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THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS
ANSWER
TO
The Reverend Dr. PRIESTLEY's
FREE ADDRESS,
ON THE SUBJECT OF
The LORD'S SUPPER.

UPON
SCRIPTURAL and RATIONAL Principles.
In a SERIES of LETTERS to the AUTHOR.
WITH
Some OCCASIONAL REMARKS on his *Letter to the Rev.*
Mr. VENN, and on *Bp. HOADLY's Plain Account*.

Εἰ τις με ἐλεγξαι, καὶ παρασῆσαι, ὅτι ἐκ ὀρθῶς ὑπολαμβάνεται
ἡ πρᾶξις, δύναται, χαίρων μεταβησομαι· ζήτω γὰρ τῆς
ἀληθείας ὑφ' ἧς κἀγὼς πώποτε ἐβλαβῆν. Μ. ΑΥΡ.

L O N D O N:
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PROTESTANT DISSENTING

O T

The Reverend Dr. PRILESTLY'S

HERBERT A. DRESS

TO: T231812 INT 100

THE WORLD'S SUPPLY



SCRIPTUREAL NATIONAL THINSPITE.

In a series of letters to the Authors.

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Some Occasional Remarks on the State of the City

Mr. Vane, and on Dr. Lloyd's Plain Account.

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P R E F A C E.

IT might naturally have been expected, that *A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters*, and especially so free an one as Dr. PRIESTLEY's, on the subject of the *Lord's Supper*, in which they are charged, as a body, with entertaining many unscriptural and superstitious notions concerning it, should have met with an answer from one of their own denomination; and it has been matter of surprise and concern to many, that they have hitherto suffered it to pass without animadversion. Some have accounted for this by supposing, that the Doctor's book was so little different from HODLEY's *plain account*, and at the same time written in a manner so much inferior to it, as to render an answer altogether unnecessary; while others, on the contrary, have ascribed it to its being unanswerable. What is the true reason, the author of the following work will not venture to say; but could not help thinking that it admitted of a very easy answer, and deserved a serious one; as it seemed to him calculated to injure the reputation of the Dissenters in the esteem of others, and to do hurt to many among themselves, in abating their just reverence for the Lord's Supper, and in promoting a spirit

of indifference in the minds of those who were unacquainted with what had been written against the Doctor's plan; which on the first view appears extremely plausible, as the express words of Christ and his apostles are proposed as the only rule of judgment. And he imagined that many readers would be prejudiced in favour of the work by the Doctor's distinguished reputation in the literary world. In these apprehensions he was confirmed by hearing, that this *Free Address* was much read, so as quickly to pass through a second * edition; that it was made the common topic of conversation, not only in the most considerable towns in Yorkshire, but in many other parts of the kingdom; and that it was highly extolled, not only by the Doctor's friends among the Dissenters, but also by some learned clergymen in the church of England. These circumstances induced the author to think of venturing abroad a few remarks upon the performance.

Some readers will, probably, wonder that they should have been delayed so long after the Doctor's publication; and others, that they should appear at all, after the answer written by the Rev. Mr. Venn. The true account of the matter is as follows: The ensuing work was begun soon after the *Free Address* came out; but the author entirely laid aside his design of engaging in the controversy, without finishing the first Letter, from an apprehension that it would be executed by some abler hand. Nor did he resume his design (nor ever think of doing it) till Mr. Venn's work appeared: which, he must take the liberty to say, he thought was so far from superseding an answer by a Dissenter, as to render

* N. B. The references in the following Letters are constantly made to the first edition. Though the second edition is said to be *with improvements*, the author, upon looking it over, finds no occasion to alter any of his remarks.

one the more necessary; not only as it revived the attention of the public to Dr. Priestley's book, but seemed to imply that no Dissenter had ability or zeal enough to defend the sentiments and practices which it so freely condemned.

The Dissenters are indeed much obliged to that worthy gentleman for the good will he has expressed towards them, in pleading their cause. But he must excuse those of them who are of opinion, that his piece is not adapted to answer the end proposed. It doubtless contains many good remarks, and discovers a seriousness of spirit, and a zeal for evangelical religion, which are truly commendable. But some of his friends have thought that he has entered too largely into a debate about points of faith, and too little into the main subject of dispute: that he has written with too much heat, and discovered too great a dislike to that freedom of enquiry which truth need never shun, but rather demands, as most favourable to its cause. Besides, it could not be expected from him, as a clergyman of the church of England, so fully to vindicate the conduct of the Dissenters, in certain particulars to which the Doctor had objected, as one of their own body would be disposed to do, and would be capable of doing with advantage. Through these and the like circumstances, Mr. Venn has defeated his own design, as those who before had espoused Dr. Priestley's notions, it is said, triumph in this answer as a confirmation of them, and as a remarkable proof, that the orthodox cause is incapable of a rational and scriptural defence. Dr. Priestley himself seems to be greatly offended with Mr. Venn, as "having obtruded himself into a business in which he had no concern," and wishes to have had a Dissenter for his antagonist*. As he was now unlikely to be gratified in this respect by any one else, the author of the follow-

* See Letter to Mr. Venn, p. 35.

ing Letters was resolved to communicate to the Doctor and to the public some remarks which had occurred to him on his first reading the Free Address, brief hints of which he had preserved in the margin. In this resolution he was confirmed after perusing the Doctor's reply to Mr. Venn, which he thought was very far from being a full vindication of his former account of the Lord's Supper, but at the same time calculated to propagate his notions, and bring great contempt upon the opposite sentiments, among such readers as might have formed their judgment principally from Mr. Venn's vindication of them.

The Author, as a consistent Dissenter, is an advocate for the right of private judgment, and a freedom of enquiry in matters of religion as well as other subjects; and at the same time that he considers the Word of God as the only and infallible rule of divine truth, he pleads for the use of our reason in judging what is the sense of it; and thinks that every man has an unalienable right to speak what he thinks, and to publish to the world the result of his enquiries, whatsoever it may be. He moreover looks upon it as incumbent on Christians to exercise candour and charity towards those that differ from them, even in matters of considerable moment, without suspecting their sincerity, or condemning them as heretics, while they write with decency, and profess themselves the disciples of our common Lord, though, after a fair examination, they cannot but judge their opinions erroneous; making allowance for men's different education, prejudices, and natural tempers; at the same time remembering they themselves are not infallible. Dr. Priestley has suggested some hints on this head in his *Considerations on the differences among Christians*, which the author read with pleasure, and which he has endeavoured to keep in view in the following pages.

pages. Though he cannot but think that many of the Doctor's sentiments, and particularly those relating to the Lord's Supper, have a very dangerous tendency in a practical view, he would by no means be thought to charge him with maintaining the consequences of them, or with acting in strict conformity to them; but is willing to hope that his conduct is more conformable to the purity of the gospel than his views of its doctrines seem to require.

The author is sensible of his unfitness, in many views, to contend with an adversary of Dr. Priestley's learning and abilities; but is encouraged by the approbation of some friends, to whose judgment he cannot but pay great deference; and by a consciousness that his view in writing is not to censure Dr. Priestley, but to promote the cause of truth and practical religion. He acknowledges the work is not composed with so much accuracy as he could wish, and in particular that the stile is too diffuse; but he hopes the candid reader will overlook blemishes of this sort, or any inadvertencies he may observe, when he considers, that the length of time, since the Doctor's piece appeared, rendered it necessary to publish these remarks upon it in a more hasty manner than the author would otherwise have chosen. And he wishes, moreover, to have it remembered, that he not merely writes to the *Doctor*, but for the benefit of *common people*, to whom he imagines some circumstances in his manner of writing may be particularly adapted, which men of learning may censure as faults.

To convince Dr. Priestly that he has erred in the grand points of debate between us, is what the author does not presume to expect: If he should make it appear to him and his friends, that the notions he has opposed are not quite so irrational or unscriptural as he has represented them, he shall not think his time wholly lost; and if he should answer the
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expectation which the Doctor says he had raised from Mr. Venn's performance, so that he may "derive some advantage from it, to correct some mistakes, or to amend some obnoxious expressions, which through inadvertence might have escaped him, whenever his book comes to a third edition," it is the utmost he can hope for. If any common readers should be established in, or recovered to, those views of the Lord's Supper, and of other doctrines nearly related to it, which appear to the author to be supported both by scripture and reason, his grand view in writing will be answered.

But should the Doctor, or any one else, be able plainly to prove that the ensuing work is founded on mistaken principles; more especially if it should prove the occasion of a thorough investigation of the subject; and be productive of a truly rational and scriptural account of the Lord's Supper, how different soever from his own, he hopes he shall be so far from being mortified thereat, that he should cordially rejoice, and think his present time and pains amply rewarded. For (to close with the sentiment of the philosophic emperor, which he has chosen for his motto) "If any one be able to shew him that he is mistaken, whether it be in relation to any point of sentiment or of conduct, he will very readily correct it; for he seeks after *truth*, and that can do no body any harm."

April 18, 1770.

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ERRATA.

Page 19. line 15. read, contained in. p. 28. l. 29. dele or, p. 33. l. last but two; r. body and. p. 43. l. 28. for ? put a period. p. 47. l. 8. r. conversion, p. 79. l. 3. r. christian church. p. 109. l. 5. r. Vith. p. 128. Note, r. passover. N. B. The quotation, p. 27. with the remarks upon it, should have been introduced p. 26. after the break directly opposite. And the reader is desired to correct that sentence, p. 26. l. 9, "As you have not laid, &c." thus: I will take the liberty to invert your order; and will first take notice, &c.



THE
Protestant Dissenter's Answer
TO
Dr. PRIESTLEY'S FREE ADDRESS.

LETTER I.

Reverend SIR,

I AM a PROTESTANT, and a PROTESTANT DISSENTER ; I therefore consider myself, amongst others of that character, as publicly addressed in a late work of yours, and think I have a right to make a publick reply to what I judge exceptionable in it. Your professed design is laudable, and the freedom which you propose to use, and which you recommend to others, in enquiring after truth, is, in my apprehension, highly warrantable, becoming a Christian, a Protestant, and a Dissenter. As POPERY is doubtless the worst corruption of the best religion in the world, every friend to that religion ought to be vigilant in detecting those corruptions which Popery has introduced, and zealous in exposing them.

I cannot but agree with you, Sir, in thinking it highly improbable that the first Reformers should

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have hit upon the whole truth at once, and left nothing untouched that wanted reforming; and also, that it is very unlikely that even to this day, the Religion of Jesus, among any one denomination of christians, should be perfectly stript of that garb in which popish superstition had cloathed it; or at least that it should be entirely free from every error in doctrine, discipline or worship. It is unwise and unsafe for any man to take it for granted that this or the other doctrine is 'the truth as it is in Jesus', merely because the reformers from popery thought so, or because it has been long held such by protestants. I am far from thinking that even the *Dissenters*, whose principles are the most favourable to the cause of liberty, and therefore to the cause of truth, have in every respect acted strictly upon those principles, or as yet entirely 'purged themselves from the old leaven.'

It is therefore to be hoped that the reformation will yet proceed: and, in order hereto, that the friends of truth, as it is taught in the Bible, will yet enquire, will yet speak, and will yet be heard. But, having freely expressed my hearty agreement with you thus far, I must observe, that our enquiries after truth ought to be conducted with reverence to the divine word as the only proper Rule, and with a modest sense of our own weakness and liableness to err: And that it is by no means safe implicitly to follow the decisions of those who call themselves free enquirers, who profess the greatest impartiality, and who appear to be possessed of it, any more than those of our first reformers; since it must be allowed, all men are not so impartial in their researches as they profess to be, and even the most upright enquirer after truth may fall into mistakes concerning it, by reason of such prejudices as imperceptibly pervert the judgment, and thro' a variety of circumstances, inseparable from humanity, in consequence of which the truth pretended to be discovered is often only a new error in
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the room of an old one ; sometimes less dangerous, but sometimes more ; or at best, but a partial discovery. And not unfrequent is it for men, in professing to reform abuses, to run out of one extream into the opposite, equally absurd and dangerous. I need not offer the proof of these assertions, since you yourself, Sir, in effect allow the truth of them when you say, that “ as on the one hand it has been common for “ reformers to stop too soon, so on the other, that the “ ardour of reformation may justly be supposed to “ carry men too far, and that mankind do frequently “ pass from one extream to the opposite. (Pref. p. v.)

You cannot therefore be offended, nor can you greatly wonder, if some among your readers should not implicitly acquiesce in the result of your enquiries, or should think they were not conducted with all that candour and impartiality which you profess ; and that in your *ACCOUNT of the LORD'S SUPPER*, you have gone just as far beyond what you call “ the “ one just medium,” as some other reformers have stopt short of it.

Of this number, I, Sir, profess myself to be one. As a Protestant, and especially as a Dissenter, I claim the same right to be heard that you do, and persuade myself that from you I need ask no indulgence. While you treat with so great a freedom the opinions and writings of others, it may be presumed you will candidly attend to what may be offered against your own.

Before I take any notice of your account of the matter in debate, I find it necessary particularly to consider the Rule by which we are to be determined in our enquiries concerning it. I take it for granted that you are willing to rest the whole issue upon scripture testimony, as you profess (p. 49.) to approve this protestant principle, and to act upon it in your quotations from the New Testament writers, notwithstanding what you have occasionally insinuated, (p.

4 *Dissenter's Answer to Dr. Priestley.*

P. 28.) which may be thought by many to invalidate their testimony. Upon this principle I am heartily willing to rest the whole controversy. But I find myself obliged to differ from you with regard to the manner of explaining scripture. You have not indeed directly told us in what manner you propose to explain it; tho' this might naturally have been expected in a *PLAIN Account of the Lord's Supper*; but you have evidently built your whole structure (after the manner of BISHOP HOADLY whom you profess to follow) upon this maxim as the grand foundation, "That we are to form our notions concerning the Lord's Supper merely by what the scripture *expressly* says in *immediate* relation to the subject."

This maxim you do in effect adopt as the ground of your whole argument, tho' you do not directly mention it; as appears from the general tenor of your work, and especially from such passages as the following: "I shall lay before you an account of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, as it may be collected from the Evangelists, and from St. * Paul.—To give you the more entire satisfaction upon this subject, I shall fairly recite to you every thing that I find in the New Testament relating to it, even with the repetitions of the different evangelists. — By this means you will see that nothing is overlooked or concealed from you." You then relate the words of the Institution as recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, together with part of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, concerning their abuse of the ordinance, and then make the following remark: "You have now, my brethren, seen all that the scriptures say concerning this rite of the Lord's Supper. How little is it, in comparison of what men have made of it!" (p. 26.)

* Query, whether the application of the term *Saint* to any of the Apostles, be entirely consistent with Dr. Priestley's utter antipathy to every thing that favours of popish original?

Little indeed ! if these are the only scriptures by which our notions of it are to be determined, and if we are to attend only to the Letter of them : and yet much more than you have made of it in your *Free Address*, as I purpose hereafter to shew. But as it is a matter of great importance in the present controversy whether the maxim you have adopted be just or not, I will here examine it, and give you my reasons for pronouncing in the negative, and for maintaining the following sentiment, viz.

That in order to understand the sense of scripture concerning any point in debate, we are not confined to the mere Letter, but are at liberty to judge of what is expressly asserted concerning that point (and especially if it be asserted in a concise and obscure manner) in its connection with others, and by other passages which may give light to the subject by a remote relation to it; as also by such inferences as may fairly be deduced from what is expressly asserted upon the point in question : — That if any question shall arise concerning it which the scripture has not determined, we must judge of it, as far as we can, from analogy : and by the application of general rules elsewhere laid down : — And that if in any particular, scripture thus interpreted should not determine, we are to use our own reason, and judge according to the rules of common sense. In this manner, Sir, I apprehend we are to form our notions with regard to the positive institutions, as well as any other of the doctrines of the gospel : and, amongst the rest, of the Lord's Supper.

We are no where told that the mere letter of scripture is to be our only guide, nor is it rational to think it should ; and in our controversy with the papists on the subject before us, we are obliged to assert, and can easily prove, the contrary. Upon a close attention to the passages now under consideration we shall find them insufficient of themselves to resolve our

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enquiries. Examine those texts which you have quoted as containing the whole account of the Lord's Supper, independent of all other scriptures, and you will be unable to put any rational meaning to them. Let a Turk or an Heathen, who knows nothing of the New Testament, be asked what his sense of them is, and I am persuaded they would appear to him utterly unintelligible. The truth is, they are addressed to Christians * who are supposed to be acquainted with certain things therein referred to, which it was no more necessary to express, than it would be in any new act of parliament made for Dissenters in Great Britain, to shew at large who the Dissenters are, what laws are already in force with respect to them, or any other particulars respecting them which were necessary to be known in order to understand the meaning of the said act; but which were universally understood by them already. In such a case a Foreigner, quite a stranger to our country, to the several denominations of christians amongst us, and the laws relating to them, would be quite at a loss to understand such an act as I am speaking of, tho' expressed in the plainest words. In that case we should not be for confining the stranger to the mere words of the act, in order to understand it, but should acquaint him with the character of the persons to whom it related, and the other laws respecting them with which it was connected. And if any questions should arise concerning any particular circumstances not expressly

* On this head the late *Mr. Law* (much as he decried reason) has argued very rationally in his answer to *Bishop Hoadly's plain account*. N. B. It is from this book that *Mr. Venn* had brought a quotation about which Dr. Priestley is pleased to make himself merry †, but which he had better have answered. I cannot help thinking with *Mr. Venn* ‡, that before the Dr. had written a book on the principle of the said Bishop's, he ought to have read what had been written against it. But it is not peculiar to any one class of people to read only on *one side* the question.

† Letter to Mr. V. p. 45.

‡ P. 42.

provided for in the said act, but only in general terms, we should judge it sufficient for such questions, that they were fully provided for in some previous acts, or that general rules were laid down in other laws which might be applied to the particulars in question; and in many cases the common usages of the country alone would determine.

This instance I apprehend will serve in some measure to illustrate the case of those positive institutions which the gospel enjoins upon us Christians. The scripture is not so full and explicit with regard to any of them, in those passages which enjoin them, as would be sufficient to give an utter stranger to christianity any clear ideas at all about them. With regard to the observation of the first day of the week as the christian *Sabbath*; tho' it so generally obtains in the christian world, we are so far from having all circumstances with respect to it fully determined for us in the New Testament, that there is no express precept for the change from the seventh day, or for observing a Sabbath at all. In vindication of the usage therefore we are obliged to adopt a rule for interpreting scripture different from that which you have prescribed, which allows of more room for the exercise of our reasoning powers.

The case is much the same with regard to *Baptism*. There is so little determinate in scripture concerning the Mode of it, that it has been the matter of long and warm contention in the church. Nor are we more expressly acquainted who are the proper Subjects of baptism. There is nothing in the words of the institution, nor in any after accounts of the administration of this rite, respecting the baptism of Infants: there is not a single precept for, nor example of, this practice thro' the whole New Testament. By the rule therefore on which you have proceeded in interpreting scripture, we must be obliged to give up the cause of Infant-baptism: I should be glad to know, Sir, how you, consistently with

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this, can maintain it. * To plead the liberty of reasoning from the nature of the Ordinance, or from certain *data* laid down in other parts of scripture, or (with *Dr. Taylor*) to build the whole argument on the Abrahamic covenant, is in fact giving up the point in debate between us; it is saying, "that in order to understand the nature &c. of a positive institution, we are not obliged to confine our enquiries to those particular passages of scripture which immediately relate to it," which is granting all that I am pleading for, and from which concession it will be easy to prove that your account of the Lord's Supper is a very partial one; unless you will assert that this ordinance so essentially differs from the other two which I have mentioned, as to require a different rule for interpreting scripture in order to understand it. But I cannot suppose you will be unreasonable enough to make such an assertion. This and the other positive institutions most evidently appear to be, in this respect, exactly upon the same footing. With regard to this as well as the others, there are many circumstances left undetermined in those scriptures which immediately relate to the subject, which are indeed absolutely necessary to be determined some way or other, by every communicant for himself at least, in order to render the ordinance a reasonable service, or indeed, to its being celebrated at all. In the passages you have quoted as containing all that the New Testament says concerning the Lord's Supper, we have no account of the Person whom we are to remember in this ordinance (excepting that his name is barely mentioned) we are not told what was his character, what were his pretensions, and in what

* N. B. The reader may see the force of this reasoning, by perusing a Series of Letters on the subject of Baptism, written by a sensible and candid Anti-pædo-baptist, addressed to *Bishop Hoadly* on the plan of his *Plain Account*; which, if that plan be allowed just, must be owned unanswerable.

view we are to remember him; nor are we here acquainted with those important facts relating to him, the knowledge of which lies at the very foundation of christianity. How then can these passages, of themselves, be supposed to give us a compleat knowledge of this institution? In order to obtain it therefore it is plain, we are to consider these passages in their connection with the other parts of the New Testament where these interesting facts, represented by this ordinance, are fully related.

Further; in those texts which you say are the only ones from whence our ideas of the Lord's Supper are to be derived, there is nothing said concerning the persons by whom this rite is to be celebrated, whether they are to be both male and female (and men only were present at the first institution) nor at what age they are to come to it, nor how often. Nor are we told at what time of the day it is to be administered, nor by whom; nor what quantity of bread and wine are to be received, nor in what posture. Tho' it be allowed some of these questions are but trivial, they must be determined one way or another in order to celebrate the ordinance at all. But how shall we determine upon them? The answer is obvious. Common sense is sufficient to decide with regard to many of them, and reasoning from analogy, from the nature of christianity in general, and of this ordinance in particular, will enable us to judge with regard to others.

It does not appear to me, any reflection upon the wise author of this institution, that he has left some particulars of it so indeterminate, and that he has hereby left so much room for us to exercise our reasoning powers: it is rather a proof of his wisdom in his conduct towards reasonable creatures. In *other* cases I apprehend, Sir, I should have your hearty suffrage for speaking in this manner, and why not in the present? But I have often had occasion to ob-
serve

serve a strange inconsistency in some of you very rational gentlemen in your decisions with regard to the authority of scripture, and the use of Reason: In some instances we must be tied down to the very letter of scripture and denied the liberty of reasoning upon it, while in others, Reason is all in all, and even the express declarations of scripture must be forced to submit to it. The like conduct in other persons would be accounted for, only upon the supposition, that they were determined at any rate to serve their own particular purposes.

Having thus attempted to shew the weakness of your foundation, I might now proceed to examine the superstructure which you have built upon it. But I cannot do justice to the subject without just hinting here at an argument in my favour, which will appear more conclusive than any other (tho' I shall have occasion hereafter frequently to refer to it) and that is one with which you yourself have furnished me, viz. In the course of your work, Sir, I find that you have in many instances forgotten, or departed from your own rule of interpreting scripture, and adopted that which I have been endeavouring to establish. Your general account of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper and of the advantages arising from attending upon it, is such as neither the words of the institution, nor the discourse of Paul express, and such as I am persuaded you would not have given, had you not reasoned upon those passages in connection with other parts of the New Testament. Nay, more than this, when you come to tell us what is professed in the celebration of this rite, you expressly *infer* your account from the nature of the ordinance, (p. 30.) and argue against the admission of scandalous persons from the Apostle's warrant for excommunicating such. What is this, Sir, but fairly acknowledging, that, contrary to your main principle, the passages which you had quoted as the only ones from whence

whence our ideas of the Lord's Supper should be derived, are of themselves insufficient for the purpose without *reasoning* upon them as they stand connected with the christian plan in general. I would fain know what boundaries are fixed to our *reasonings* upon the subject, or what greater right you have to reason from any thing in those passages in favour of your own notions of the ordinance, than those persons whom you are opposing have in favour of their's. If you allow us the same liberty it is all we ask, and we think some of those ideas which we have connected with the Lord's Supper, which you set aside as having nothing to do with it, and represent as enthusiastical and superstitious, do as truly belong to it as any that you have affixed, and are equally rational. The proof of this I will endeavour to give you in some subsequent Letters. In the mean time I am,

Rev^d. Sir,

Yours, &c.

A PROTESTANT DISSENTER.

L E T

LETTER II.

Rev. Sir,

HAVING in the preceding letter established the rule by which we are to form our notions of the Lord's Supper, I now proceed, by that rule, to examine the account which you have given of that institution.

In order to preserve my own ideas and those of my readers clear and distinct, as well as to avoid repetitions, I will consider the principal things which you have advanced, under the following heads, and in the same order, tho' somewhat different from yours.

What is the design of the Institution itself, or what is represented to us in it ?

What is supposed to be professed by those who attend upon it ?

By whom this Rite is to be celebrated ?

Who are to judge of a person's qualifications for it ?

What advantages result from the celebration of it ?

And finally

What preparation is necessary to a proper attendance upon it ?

Under some or other of these heads I shall have occasion to consider those notions of the Lord's Supper which you except against (in your catalogue of *Abuses*) as superstitious, or as having no foundation in scripture ; and shall attempt the vindication of them, as far as they appear to me to be vindicable, upon the principle which I have already laid down. I begin with

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L E T T E R II. 13

The FIRST enquiry, which is, in your own words, What is the Lord's Supper? By which I mean to enquire, What is the nature and design of the institution itself? or, What is intended to be represented to us by the exhibition of bread and wine?

You define the Lord's Supper, "A solemn, but
"cheerful rite, in remembrance of Christ, of what
"he did and suffered for the benefit of mankind."
This general account of the matter I acknowledge to be just; but must observe, that your explication of it seems not to me sufficiently particular. "Like o-
"ther customs, (say you, p. 28.) it stands as a record
"of past events; it preserves the memory of the
"most important of all transactions to the end of the
"world.—It may be considered as a proof of the
"most important facts relating to Christianity*."
This is doubtless the truth; but, I apprehend, not the *whole* truth. You will readily allow, that the remembrance of Christ, which he himself mentions as one great end of this rite, must be a remembrance of him according to what he is, of the various characters which he sustains, of the leading actions of his life, and the principal scenes of his sufferings: so that if it be true that he was 'the Son of God, God
'manifest in the flesh;' if he was the great Prophet of the church, whom it becomes us to hear in all things; the Lord and Sovereign of the world, who claims our humble obedience; the great High-priest of our profession, and the only and all-sufficient Mediator between God and man; this ordinance is de-

* You add here, "It is the only record which Christ has expressly appointed of his death and sufferings." But tho' it be true, as you further assert, that we no where find that he gave his disciples any orders to *write* his life, it does not therefore follow that they *had none*. And we are expressly assured, that he gave them strict and solemn orders to *preach* Christianity, and of course his sufferings and death. Of which therefore Christian *preaching* deserves to be called a record, of Christ's express appointment, as fitly as the Lord's Supper.

signed

14 *Dissenter's Answer to Dr. Priestley.*

signed as a memorial of him in all these views, tho' they be not particularly mentioned in the passages which you have quoted. But if this ordinance be designed as a memorial of Christ in these several views, why may it not also be considered as a memorial of the particular *ends* of his offices, his undertakings, and his sufferings, particularly of his death on the cross? These, however, you have not so much as hinted at thro' your whole performance; which I cannot but consider as a capital defect in a treatise on the Lord's Supper: and this omission naturally leads one to suppose, that you consider any particular efficacy in the obedience and death of Christ, with regard to our redemption, as having nothing to do with this ordinance; and that those who consider this as a principal thing represented in it, are chargeable with superstition, and annex other ideas to it than the scripture has annexed. But surely, Sir, the *death* of Christ is more evidently, or in a more striking and sensible manner, represented to us in this ordinance, than any thing else; the broken bread being a lively emblem of his broken body, and the wine poured forth of the shedding of his blood. Now if it be true, that 'he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; and that we have redemption thro' his blood, even the remission of sins;' this important design of the Saviour's death may as rationally be supposed to be represented to our minds by this rite, as any particular in the character of Christ, or any fact relating to Christianity. Were an anniversary feast appointed in memory of some hero that bravely died in defence of his country, would it be supposed that the design of it was merely to perpetuate the memory of the man, and not of the hero? Would not his general character, and particularly the circumstances of his death, be naturally recollected? And if he had voluntarily made a sacrifice of himself for the good
of

of the public, and chose to 'die rather than the whole nation should perish *,' would it reasonably be thought foreign to the design of the institution, gratefully to remember this uncommon instance of valour and benevolence? Would not this be judged most effectually answering the intention of that law, which had enjoined this memorial of the friend of his country, even tho' this particular view of his death were not expressly mentioned. It is not to be conceived, that the remembrance of the man and that of his death, together with the benevolent design of it, could be separated. Why then should it not be considered as one great end, if not the chief end, of the Lord's Supper, to remember Jesus as having 'died for the ungodly, as having given his 'life a ransom for many.' You cannot object to the remembrance of him as a Martyr to the cause of truth, affording by his death the most noble testimony to the doctrines which he taught; or as an example to us of patience, of fortitude in suffering in a good cause, and of submission to the divine will; I am persuaded you have often insisted upon these yourself. Why then is the other view of Christ's death to be omitted, *viz. as a sacrifice for sin* †? I will

* John xi. 50.

† In your letter to Mr. VENN you make this concession: "If Christ was, as you say, a propitiatory sacrifice, then, according to my definition, the Lord's Supper is a memorial of a propitiatory sacrifice." (p. 42.) And you tell us, in order to vindicate yourself for having taken no notice of this, that "you thought you had omitted nothing that any Christian could possibly think of on the occasion. But (say you) according to you, no just account can be given of the Lord's Supper, except we include in it all the articles of your creed." But surely, Sir, you could not be so ignorant of the doctrines commonly received among Christians, as not to know, that the belief of Christ's death as a propitiatory sacrifice is not an article peculiar to Mr. VENN's creed; how, therefore, you could really "think you had omitted nothing that any Christian could possibly think of on the occasion," is what I cannot conceive. You must know, that in all societies of Christians where the distinguishing

16 *Dissenter's Answer to Dr. Priestley.*

will not here insist how clearly this doctrine is taught in scripture, (and to me it appears as clearly taught as that he lived, or that he died); but, Sir, I must observe, that something like this appears to be taught in the *very words of the institution*; so that a plain and simple Christian might be led (even upon your own principle, of being determined in judging of the Lord's Supper by the express words of scripture relating to it) to consider the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and to commemorate it at his table in this view. For observe, our Lord himself expressly says of the sacramental bread, "This is my body, which IS GIVEN FOR YOU;" and of the wine, "This is my blood of the New Testament WHICH IS SHED FOR MANY FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS." I am at a loss, and so are many of your readers, what idea we are to affix to these words, if not that which I have mentioned; and it would have been charity in you to have told us what is the true one. Nay, I will add, justice to your subject required it; since, tho' it could not be expected from you to consider any doctrine as taught in the Lord's Supper which you do not believe to be a doctrine of scripture, your professed design, in writing upon the subject, was to give a scriptural view of it, and particularly to explain those passages of scripture which immediately relate to it, with this express view, of pointing out the several abuses of

guishing tenets of *Socinus* have not yet been admitted,¹ (which are by far the most numerous), the death of Christ is considered as a propitiatory sacrifice, and that the remembrance of it in this view is looked upon as one principal design of the Lord's Supper. In further vindication of your omission, you say, "If I have not, in my short treatise on the Lord's Supper, entered into so particular a discussion of what Christ did and suffered for the good of men, it was because it was not my professed subject. I took it for granted my readers knew what Christ had done and suffered." To this apology I think the following part of my letter a sufficient reply.

this ordinance with which the Dissenters are chargeable, and of curing them of their unscriptural and superstitious notions concerning it. We well know, that you judge the commemoration of the death of Christ as an atonement or sacrifice for sin, to be no part of the design of the Lord's Supper, because this notion of his death you deny to be a true one; and if there had been nothing in the texts you have produced as the only ones relating to this ordinance, which seemed to favour this notion of the death of Christ, you would have had a plausible reason for declining to take notice of it. But seeing this idea of it is so commonly entertained by communicants, and they think they have so strong an argument for it in the *very words of the institution*, it is exceedingly strange, that you should not have attempted to remove an opinion so irrational as this must be in your esteem, by giving the true sense of those words which I have just referred to, which tend so much to confirm it, and which, according to you, are so generally perverted; as you could not but know what the sense commonly put upon them is: and you could not overlook the passage, because you have transcribed it as one of those by which our notions of the Lord's Supper are to be formed. Some of your readers, perhaps, may be so uncandid as to conjecture, that it was the wisest way to take no notice of the words which I speak of, because you could not easily give them a sense consistent with the general language of the New Testament, without admitting a doctrine which you have discarded from your creed. Let me desire you, Sir, to read these words again with impartiality, and say whether they do not contain something so like it, as that plain and artless Christians might easily be supposed to think it a scripture-truth, and intimately connected with the Lord's Supper.

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But there is another view in which this ordinance has been considered, which you have not merely omitted to mention in your account of the design of it, but which, in another part of your work, you have excepted against, viz. *as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace*. Not to mention *this*, in speaking of the nature and end of the ordinance, appears to me as unaccountable an omission as the other, since this is as expressly asserted in the very words of the institution as the former. But to speak of this as superstitious (which you do in a subsequent passage) is more astonishing, since it appears to my reason exceedingly rational as well as scriptural. But to *pass over* those words of the institution which are the foundation of this notion of it, in absolute silence, and not hint at *any meaning*, is highly unpardonable. The words which I refer to are those of our Saviour to his disciples, when he gave them the cup. 'This,' says he (according to *Matthew*) 'is MY BLOOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT' or Covenant. Or (as *Mark* has it) THIS IS THE NEW TESTAMENT (or Covenant) IN MY BLOOD. Upon this passage, in connection with many others, is grounded that notion of the Lord's Supper which I have just now mentioned, as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. This you are pleased (p. 50) to call *Superstition*; as it is represented in the Articles of the Church of England, and in the Assembly's Catechism; which, by the way, you uncandidly, (and I will take upon me to say, falsely) call, "the Standards of Faith in the Church of England and among many Dissenters." I know no Protestants who have any standard of faith but the Bible. And I am quite at a loss to see what there is superstitious in either of the passages which you have quoted from either of these forms of doctrine. For a vindication of the twenty-fifth article of the church, I refer you to Mr. VENN's piece, in which I think he has given a very rational and satisfactory

factory one. The answers in the Assembly's Catechism, I will undertake to vindicate from your charge. A Sacrament is defined to be "An holy ordinance
 " instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs,
 " Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are re-
 " presented, sealed and applied to believers." And
 the Lord's Supper is said to be "A sacrament where-
 " in, by giving and receiving bread and wine accord-
 " ing to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed
 " forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a
 " corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made
 " partakers of his body and blood with all his bene-
 " fits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in
 " grace." The sense of both these answers seems to
 me plainly contained, or at least deducible, from the
 very words of our Lord himself. ' This (i. e. the
 ' bread) is my body — this (i. e. the wine) is my
 ' blood of the new covenant, or the new covenant in
 ' my blood.' To what could our Lord be supposed
 to refer in speaking of the new covenant, but to that
 which is spoken of in the Catechism, and which is
 commonly called *the covenant of grace*. This phraseo-
 logy I know is puritanical, but it is truly scriptural,
 and even separate from that consideration appears to
 me the fittest that could be used to express that new
 and most gracious compact into which God has con-
 descended to enter with penitent sinners that believe
 in his Son; which he has revealed in the gospel, and
 in which he has solemnly engaged to bestow upon all
 such persons pardon and salvation. Of this covenant
 Christ is represented in scripture as the Mediator, and
 his blood as the seal. It is expressly called 'the blood
 ' of the covenant.* Now let me ask any reasonable
 person, in what sense the *Wine* in the Lord's Supper
 can be called the new covenant in Christ's blood, or
 his blood of the new covenant, if it be not supposed
 the emblem of that blood of Jesus by which the co-

* Heb. x. 29. xiii. 20.

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venant of God's grace was ratified and confirmed. I cannot conceive of any other possible sense than this, and this appears an highly rational one. But what useful purpose is this emblem designed to answer, unless it is to be considered as a standing memorial in the church to the end of time, that the covenant of grace is confirmed and unchangeable, and that according to it those who repent and believe in every nation and age of the world may hope for justification and eternal life. And for what end is it that the bread and wine are to be *received* by every member of the church, if not to represent their receiving and applying to themselves the blessings of the covenant, or in other words of the same import, their receiving Christ and partaking of his body and blood for their spiritual nourishment. It is in these last expressions, I suppose, that the superstition you speak of is chiefly contained. But need I to remind Dr. Priestley that they are metaphorical expressions, and such as Christ himself has thought proper to use? The particular vindication of them, however, will better suit a subsequent part of the work, in which I may have occasion to consider others near a-kin to them which you have excepted against.

To conclude this letter: what I have been endeavouring to prove is this, that the design of the Lord's Supper on GOD's part is, to afford us a perpetual memorial of Christ in his several characters and offices, particularly of his death, and this more especially as a sacrifice for sin, and as a seal of the covenant of grace; on which account the Lord's Supper itself may be considered as a sign and a seal of the blessings of that covenant to all who comply with the requirements of it; or, in other words, to all who believe and repent. So that the blessed Jehovah, who was offended by the sins of men, may be considered as addressing himself in this ordinance to all the worthy receivers of it, in such language as
this :

this: "Come unto me, and be ye saved. I, even
 "I, am he that blotteth out your iniquities. I have
 "laid help upon one that is mighty: I have found
 "a ransom. Who is he that shall condemn? Christ
 "has died. See here the lively memorials of his
 "death. This bread is the emblem of that body of
 "his which was broken for you: this wine, of his
 "blood which was shed for many for the remission
 "of sins. By that blood my covenant of mercy
 "was sealed. In giving you this wine, I present
 "you with a solemn token of this truth, that with
 "me there is mercy and plenteous redemption, and I
 "also seal the blessing to all who are disposed by faith
 "to receive it." If this be superstition, it is such as
 is patronized by one whom, I should imagine, *you*
 would not hesitate to admit among the number of ra-
 tional divines, I mean Dr. TAYLOR, the late pro-
 fessor of divinity at *Warrington*. His paraphrase on
 the words of our Lord on delivering the cup, is as
 follows: "This cup of wine is a representation of
 "the New Testament, covenant, grant of favour,
 "or deed of gift, which God of his infinite mercy
 "hath freely bestowed on a sinful perishing world,
 "and which is founded in the merit of my blood.
 "—Our Lord expressly tells us, that his blood (or
 "perfect obedience) represented by the wine, is to be
 "considered as standing in relation to the New Te-
 "stament, or covenant of grace; and consequently,
 "in this respect, is to be considered as the object of
 "joy and exultation." After explaining this, he
 goes on to add, "This is the delicious wine, the
 "rich cordial of which we drink in the Lord's Sup-
 "per. And all these inestimable blessings God be-
 "stows with all the affection and tenderness of a
 "father to his children, with all the kindness of a
 "friend to the objects of his love. To sinners, to
 "the greatest of penitent sinners, he gives liberally;
 "he pardons abundantly; and hath appointed this
 C 3 " ordinance

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" ordinance as a TOKEN and SEAL of his cove-
" nant, for the perpetual memory of the riches of
" his goodness, that we might have strong consola-
" tion, and drink abundantly of the rivers of his
" pleasures *,"

* Taylor's Scripture-account of the Lord's Supper, 2d edit,
P. 55. 57. 61.

LET



L E T T E R III.

Rev. S I R,

IN the preceding Letter we have seen, what is represented on God's part by the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Let us now enquire what is professed on OUR part in receiving them.

The answer to this question will be determined, in a great measure, by that which was given to the former; for our professions must certainly correspond with God's declarations, and our views in receiving the ordinance, with God's design in appointing it. The question now to be considered divides itself into two parts, *viz.* What a person professes concerning his faith, and what he declares with respect to his dispositions and general conduct. I will consider each of them separately. With regard to the former,

You tell us, Sir, (p. 32.) that "the only *Opinion* " which is declared by receiving the Lord's Supper " is, That Christ is a Teacher sent from God." I can hardly suppose that you meant what your words literally import, or that you will follow the assertion into all its consequences; for upon this principle a Mahometan might with propriety attend this ordinance, since the *Koran* itself teaches that Christ was a great Prophet or a Teacher sent from God, tho' Mahomet is declared to be greater than he. Whereas this is an ordinance peculiar to Christianity, and of such a nature as that none could attend it with

propriety but Christians, who acknowledge no other Master than Christ. This I am persuaded you will readily acknowledge; and you add in the next words, "it is a profession of a man's being simply a Christian," but the contrary will follow from your first assertion; your definition of a Christian therefore, as a person who believes Christ to be a Teacher sent from God, is a very imperfect one, since according to this a Mahometan has a right to the Christian name. That man alone, Sir, can properly be called a Christian, whose Faith is peculiar to christianity; who believes something different from what persons of other religions believe; or else wherein does the difference between a Christian and any other man consist? What, for instance, distinguishes a Christian from a Mahometan? What, but the belief of some things which the other rejects, viz. the leading doctrines of the Old and New Testament, as of divine revelation; particularly those which respect JESUS CHRIST in his relation to mankind as sinful creatures, which no other religion teaches. Could that man properly be called a disciple of *Mahomet*, or of *Socrates*, or any other teacher of religion or philosophy, who merely assented to this proposition, that he taught the truth, without knowing or believing what he taught, or without believing those doctrines of his which were peculiar to himself? How then can any one with propriety be called a *Christian*, without knowing and assenting to those doctrines which *Christ* taught, which are peculiar to his religion. But if such a person could not be called a Christian, he certainly could have no right to the Lord's Supper, because by your own acknowledgment that ordinance is peculiar to Christians. It necessarily follows, therefore, that those who attend that ordinance (I mean with propriety) profess some other opinion besides that which you mention, "that Christ is a teacher sent from God," viz. the leading doctrines which he taught. If you should say,
that

that by this expression, you meant to include the belief of those general truths which Christ, as a teacher from God, has revealed ; and that the scripture often speaks of *believing Jesus to be the Christ*, as of the same import with *being a Christian* ; I answer, that your expression is by no means equivalent to this : believing Jesus to be a teacher sent from God, is far short of believing him to be the Christ, since the former character of him may be applied to all the Prophets and Apostles, yea even to Ministers of the present day. But not to insist upon the inaccuracy of your expression, and admitting that you meant by it as much as “believing that Jesus is the true Messiah, “ the Son of God,” if you really intended to include all that the scripture includes in the like expression, or the distinguishing doctrines of christianity, the passage referred to is impertinent, since nobody will assert the contrary. Christians of all persuasions maintain that receiving the Lord’s Supper is a profession of christianity, or of their belief of those doctrines which are peculiar to it, and none, that ever I heard of, suppose it a profession of such opinions as are no essential parts of it, how much soever they may be mistaken in judging what are so. It is unnecessary for me here to say what I esteem such, tho’ it were easy to mention some which all that call themselves Christians acknowledge necessary to be believed in order to entitle any one to the Christian name, and which you will not hesitate to pronounce of this kind. But this I must maintain, that whatsoever are the essential doctrines of the Christian religion, they are virtually professed in that ordinance in which a person professes himself a Christian : for a Christian without believing any of the doctrines of Christianity is a kind of being of which I can form no idea.

I have only one thing to add here, which is an inference that seems naturally to follow from what has been said : viz. that whatsoever doctrine any Christian

society

society look upon to be essential to christianity, they have a right to refuse communion to those who deny it; for otherwise, they must receive those whom they do not esteem as Christians, with whom they could have no more communion than Christ hath with Belial. But of this more hereafter.

Let us now enquire what a person is supposed to declare, by his attending the Lord's Supper, with respect to his *moral dispositions* and *conduct*. As you have not laid together your thoughts on this head, you will give me leave to collect them. And I will first take notice of what you say is *not* declared in this ordinance.

"It is not, my brethren (say you, p. 30.) a declaration of any extraordinary degree of sanctity that you make, when you attend the Lord's Supper." I don't know any, Sir, who will say it is; if by *extraordinary sanctity* you mean, as your words import, greater degrees of purity than are common to good and pious men in general. In those Books upon the Lord's Supper which you most except against, it is generally represented as equally belonging to all consistent Christians; to all whose 'conversation is as becometh the gospel,' tho' their attainments in faith and holiness be imperfect. Nay this imperfection is often urged as an argument to attend the Lord's Supper, as an important means of confirmation and growth in grace. — If, by *extraordinary sanctity*, you mean, such purity of heart and life as is essential to denominate a man a real christian, (which, considering the characters of the generality of those who go by the Christian name, may be called extraordinary) I must own there are some few in the present day who have so much of the Puritan still in them as to consider this as one thing virtually professed in attending the Lord's Supper, and as a necessary qualification for coming to this ordinance. I am not ashamed to acknowledge myself of this number; and I propose

in another place to defend the opinion against what you have advanced in opposition to it. But I dismiss it at present, partly because it will better come under consideration hereafter, and partly because I am not clear that you meant in this place to oppose it.

Again ; you say (p. 32.) “ It is not a profession of a person’s attachment to any particular sect or denomination of Christians.” It is readily granted this could not be the original or ultimate design of it, since in the primitive times, *Christians* knew no other name than that common one, and had no divisions amongst them, because they were, in the main, all of one mind. Nor are any weak enough to think that this is the principal end of the ordinance now. But it certainly is an accidental one ; and I cannot conceive but that it must necessarily be so, since such differences in sentiment have taken place in the church, and such different modes of worship have been adopted, as are incompatible with each other, as are inconsistent with uniformity or even with union in worship (what room soever there may be for the mutual exercise of charity) and such as render it necessary to divide into separate societies. It certainly cannot be a matter of absolute indifference what men believe, or in what manner the publick worship of God is conducted. It cannot therefore be indifferent with what society I unite. If the principles of any one denomination of Christians, and their mode of worship, appear to me by far more rational scriptural and edifying than those of other sects, surely it is my wisdom and my duty statedly to unite with such a society, not merely for my own edification, but also to bear my testimony to what I judge to be the truth, and against what I consider as gross corruptions of christianity. But where shall I receive the Lord’s Supper ? Where, but with those whom I esteem the purest set of Christians ? not merely because communicating with others, (should they permit it) would
appear

appear to be countenancing erroneous doctrines and practices, and unscriptural terms of communion (and there are many which you, Sir, consider in that light) but it would really be a tacit approbation of them. In what way could a person more strongly declare that he belonged to this or that particular sect, than by constantly joining with them in worship (I mean where other places of worship were near) and partaking with them, in their way, of the Lord's Supper? Your own remark (p. 21.) upon that passage in which Paul reproves the Corinthians for partaking of the heathen sacrifices is a confirmation of what I say. 'Ye cannot (says the Apostle) drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of devils.' Your remark is this: "The whole meaning of this passage is, that joining in idolatrous worship is the same thing as renouncing christianity." That is, this is not only the commonly received, but the natural, language of the action. By the same rule it may be said, that stately joining in worship at all, (especially receiving the sacramental bread and wine) with any that I judge a corrupt set of Christians, is tacitly renouncing what I consider as true christianity. An approbation of the distinguishing tenets and practices of any one set of Christians is not only, as you allow, the commonly received, but the real and natural language of frequent communion with them. Nor does it appear to me at all foreign to, or much less inconsistent with, the original and grand design of the Lord's Supper, to consider and acknowledge my receiving it stately with one particular denomination of Christians, as a proof that I am, *in the main*, of their persuasion, while I receive the ordinance *itself* as a proof that I am a Christian.

Having thus considered what you assert is *not*, I will now attend to what you say *is*, professed in the Lord's Supper.

On

On this head you express yourself thus : “ The
 “ utmost that can fairly be inferred by any just con-
 “ sequence from the nature of the ordinance is, that
 “ since the custom is peculiar to Christians, it may be
 “ considered as an open declaration of a man’s chri-
 “ stianity. The language of it will then be this :
 “ By joining in this solemn action in remembrance
 “ of Christ, I declare myself a Christian, and resolve
 “ by the grace of God to live and die as becomes a
 “ Christian : for (say you) a resolution to behave as
 “ becomes a Christian is the necessary consequence of
 “ an honest man’s declaring himself to be one.” (p.
 30.) Upon this passage I beg leave to make the fol-
 lowing remarks. The first is, that this account of the
 matter is much more than I can find in any passage of
 scripture, treating directly of the Lord’s Supper.
 You do not, indeed, pretend that it is *expressed* in any
 of the texts which you had before quoted, but you
infer this general account of it, as a profession of one’s
 christianity, from the *nature of the ordinance*, and from
 that inference deduce this further particular, that it is
 a profession of a *resolution to live as becomes a Christian*.
 I have no objection, Sir, to either of these inferences,
 I believe them to be just : but in having recourse to
 them, I must remark, that you forgot the grand prin-
 ciple which you adopted from *Bishop Hoadly*, that we
 are to be guided by the words of scripture relating to
 the ordinance, and that Christ and his Apostles have
 decided all matters relating to it with sufficient clear-
 ness. If you reserve to yourself a right to *infer* any
 thing from what you apprehend the nature of the
 ordinance, you give us a great advantage against
 you, by leaving *us* also at liberty to infer any thing
 which we think justly deducible from what we judge
 to be the true nature of the institution ; unless you
 deny us the liberty which you claim to yourself. Let
 us then no more hear it said, this or that does not be-
 long to the Lord’s Supper, because it is not fully ex-
 pressed

pressed in the passages which you have cited as the only ones relating to it, since this is equally true with respect to your *own* account of it.—But I must further remark, that what you infer from the nature of the ordinance concerning the profession made in it, is inconsistent with the main drift of your work, which to me appears to be this, viz. to prove that the Lord's Supper is only a publick declaration of a man's christianity, or his belief that Jesus is a teacher sent from God, and that therefore ALL, who in *this general sense* are Christians, ought to attend this ordinance. That this is your sentiment is sufficiently evident from such passages as those, p. 28, 32, 42, &c. some of which I shall have occasion hereafter to quote. But it is notoriously inconsistent with this sentiment to say, as you do here, that the language of the action in receiving the Lord's Supper is, "I resolve to live and die like a Christian." This is saying much more than that "I am a christian," in that sense of the expression which you have elsewhere given, and there are many persons who can truly say the one, who are very far from being able with truth to say the other. You add in vindication of this, "for a resolution to behave as a Christian is the necessary consequence of an honest man's declaring he is one." I must own I can see no necessary connection between these two. A man may very honestly declare that he is a Christian in your general sense of the word, viz. that he believes Christ to be a teacher sent from God, without any resolution or intention to act according to that belief. What you have asserted in another place (p. 43.) is undoubtedly true, "that receiving the Lord's Supper, which is the same thing as saying in the face of the world *I am a Christian*, certainly implies an *obligation* to live as becomes a Christian." All indeed who believe that Jesus is the Christ, are (as you further observe) under an *obligation* to live according to such a belief, whether they declare

declare it or not. But is an *obligation* the same thing as a *resolution*? In my apprehension they are as different as a sense of duty, and the practice of it. Give me leave to observe, it is your confounding these that has led you into a mistake which runs thro' your performance, by which your readers are liable to be bewildered. If you had asserted that an attendance upon the Lord's Supper implies a *profession* of *obligation* to live like a Christian, *that* would have agreed very well with your main principle, that all who believe in Jesus as the Messiah have a right to this ordinance, and with your general account of it as a profession of a man's christianity. But a *resolution* to live and die like a Christian is a profession which all such persons cannot make. It therefore follows, either that such a resolution is not implied in attending this ordinance, or else that a mere belief that Jesus is the Christ is not, as you have asserted, the only qualification for it; for those who have only this belief, but no such resolution as you mention, by attending this ordinance, in which that resolution is professed, do profess a lie. In a word, if an attendance upon the Lord's Supper implies a resolution to live and die as becomes a Christian, it implies every thing which we contend for as necessary in a worthy communicant, and may be considered as including all those pious dispositions and devout exercises of the mind which we assert this ordinance requires. What they are, I am now particularly to shew.

And here I must proceed according to the rule which you have adopted, viz. *inferring* from the nature of the ordinance. I have already shewed that it is a memorial of Christ, in general; particularly of his death; and among other views of it, as a sacrifice for sin; and that it is also a sign or seal of the covenant of grace. I infer then from this account, that those who with propriety attend the ordinance, so as to answer the design of it, seriously remember the Lord Jesus Christ according

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ing to his several characters and offices : that they gratefully recollect what he did and suffered for their sakes, and that love of his which was the spring of all : That they profess their faith in the efficacy of his death to put away sin, their cordial approbation of that method of salvation which God has appointed thro' the blood of his cross, and (as sinful miserable creatures) their thankful acceptance of divine mercy thro' this blessed mediator.—And whereas Christ speaks of the wine as the new covenant in his blood, or the emblem of that blood by which the covenant of grace was confirmed, and as such, a sign, token, or pledge of the blessings of that covenant imparted to all the faithful ; I infer, that those who receive this cup aright, thankfully acknowledge their obligations to divine mercy for those covenant blessings, express their own cordial acceptance of them upon the terms on which they are offered, and as parties in this covenant, solemnly declare their hearty compliance with the requirements of it ; that is to say, that they repent of sin, that they believe in Christ, that they obey his gospel, and devote themselves to God thro' him, with an hearty resolution to be for ever his ; to be and do and bear whatsoever he would have them. These are the requirements of the gospel covenant from all who partake of the blessings of it. The Lord's Supper is the sign or seal of this covenant in both these views. God, by giving bread and wine, declares his free donations of these blessings upon faith and repentance. We, by receiving it, declare our acceptance of them upon these terms : that is to say, that we believe and repent ; for without this, they cannot be received.—To this I must add, that by partaking of this ordinance in a *social* manner, with the members of Christ's church, we profess our relation to them as brethren, our esteem for them as such, and our consent to all the duties of this relation : that we will perform any offices of kindness for them

as they shall have need and we opportunity ; will readily give or receive friendly exhortations and reproofs as there shall be occasion, and peaceably submit to that discipline which Christ has wisely appointed in his church. That such a relation to the church of Christ is implied in attending the Lord's Supper is evident from what Paul expressly asserts on this head (1 Cor. x. 17.) ' We being many are one bread ' and one body, for we are all partakers of that one ' bread.' As to the particular duties of this relation which I have mentioned, they so naturally result from it, and are so plainly laid down in scripture, that it is unnecessary to attempt the proof of them.

Now from this account of the nature of the ordinance and the consequent profession implied in it, we may judge who are they that ' eat this bread and ' drink this cup unworthily ;' and so we shall be led to the next enquiry, which is indeed intimately connected with this,—By whom this Rite is to be celebrated.

You tell us in effect, that in the present day, no persons can receive this ordinance unworthily : for having quoted Paul's reproof of the Corinthians for their indecent behaviour at the Lord's table, you subjoin the following remark : " All the censure that St. Paul passes upon unworthy communicants, I " would observe by the way, relates *wholly* to such a " manner of receiving this ordinance as is no where " practised at this day in any christian country. His " censures therefore are evidently such as no Christi- " ans at this day can apply to themselves." Let us see what those censures are. He says ' this is not to eat ' the Lord's Supper'—insinuates that they ' eat and ' drank unworthily'—that they did ' not discern the ' Lord's body'—and that they were ' guilty of the ' bodand blood of the Lord.' He therefore speaks of them as ' eating and drinking judgement to them- ' selves—and as coming together unto condemna-
D ' tion.'

tion.' In the former of these clauses he represents their fault ; in the latter the bad consequences of it. But neither of these appear to me of such a nature as to be applicable to none but those Corinthians. As to the *censure* which the Apostle passes upon them, he does not so much as insinuate that they were guilty of such a manner of receiving the Lord's Supper as was the only possible abuse of it ; so far from this, that he does not directly apply the charge of receiving this rite unworthily to them ; but after he had mentioned their indecent manner of celebrating it, gives them a true account of the institution, and concludes with a *general* admonition concerning the sin and danger of abusing it, and a *general* exhortation with respect to a due approach to it. 'I have received of the Lord Jesus, &c.— Wherefore *whosoever* shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man (i. e. every man) examine himself and so let him eat &c. for he that (i. e. whosoever) eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgement to himself.' By the word *unworthily* is universally understood, a manner of receiving the ordinance that is unsuitable to its nature and design. The term is general, and may be applied to every possible abuse of this institution. And as general is that other part of the censure, 'this is not to eat the Lord's Supper.' By the phrase 'not discerning the Lord's body,' the Apostle indeed particularly refers to the abuse of the Corinthians ; but it is easy to conceive of others to which it might as fitly be applied. As to those clauses which relate to the bad consequences of receiving the ordinance unworthily, they may as easily be applied to every particular manner of doing so. Do you ask me for any instances of this kind which can be supposed to happen in the present day ? Would to God we were at a loss for any as gross as the Corinthian irregularity ! You
yourself

yourself, Sir, have furnished me with several, which you call *abuses* of this rite; a word which to me conveys much the same idea with receiving it unworthily. You tell us "making the Lord's Supper a qualification for a *civil office* (p. 33.) is such a base prostitution of it, that it becomes every person who has a just regard for the honour of religion to bear his testimony against it." I would ask whether a *base prostitution* of this rite, be not an expression at least equally strong with that of the Apostle, eating and drinking unworthily? The doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, and the adoration of the elements, you justly stile "a corruption of this institution to a degree which would have exceeded the bounds of credibility, had it not remained in the church of Rome at this day as a monument of the utmost extravagance of the human imagination." (p. 42.) And (p. 48.) you ascribe to this "absurd doctrine, horrid consequences." I ask you, Sir, whether this is to *receive the Lord's Supper*? whether those who thus conceive of this ordinance can be said to *discern the Lord's body*? or whether they are unjustly charged with *eating unworthily*? You cannot surely answer in the negative; but if in the affirmative, you allow what you had before denied, that the Apostle's censure may be applied to others as well as to the Corinthians. With as much reason may these several expressions be applied to all who entertain unworthy sentiments of the ordinance, or attend upon it with base designs, or dispositions unsuitable to it.

To the same effect *Mr. Venn* had expressed himself in relation to your remark concerning the Apostle's censure of the Corinthians (p. 47.) But you tell him "you really did not expect that a remark, which you still think extremely just and obvious, would have been called in question." (p. 49.) And in the next page you add "I appeal to *common sense*, and notwithstanding your peculiar method of reasoning about the matter (*which I think not worth*

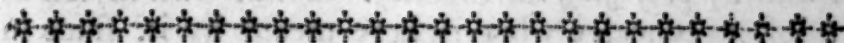
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" *my while to examine,*) I abide by my first assertion." Not to say any thing of the *candour* and *humility* which this last passage expresses, give me leave, Sir, to observe, that just and obvious as your remark may appear to yourself, Mr. *Venn* was not quite so singular in his *general* application of the Apostle's censure of the Corinthians as you imagine, for Bishop *Hoadly* himself, whose plan you have professedly adopted, has expressly contradicted the sentiment which you so confidently maintain, tho' Mr. *Venn* was so much mistaken as to suppose you borrowed it from him : A circumstance which may possibly have made you the more tenacious of it. The Bishop's words are these : " I do not confine the guilt of eating and drinking unworthily to the strict imitation of the Corinthian sinners in the one particular instance of their indecency ; but think it ought to be extended to all cases, to which the Apostle's argument drawn from the institution itself, by parity of reason, can reach. Whatever temper or behaviour at the time of eating and drinking is utterly unsuitable to the design of the duty, must, in its degree, come under the censure of this passage *." If you should think it worth your while to examine *this* reasoning," I shall hope to escape, in some degree, that contempt with which you have loaded Mr. *Venn*, and which I might otherwise have expected for attempting his defence.

That the censure of the passage under consideration is applicable to communicants in general who are destitute of true piety, I shall be led to prove under the next head of enquiry, which I reserve as the subject of my next Letter.

I am, &c.

* *Hoadly's plain Account*, p. 80.



L E T T E R IV.

Rev. SIR,

THE next question proposed to be considered (viz. *by whom* is the Lord Supper to be celebrated) is so intimately connected with the last, that the answer which was given to *that* will determine what is to be given to this. Whatsoever profession is implied in attending the ordinance, those persons and those *only* ought to attend it who can with truth make that profession. If receiving the Lord's Supper be only a declaration of a man's christianity, then all who believe christianity may and ought to receive it. But if this action implies a profession of a practical regard to Christ and the gospel, then those alone who possess that qualification can with propriety engage in it. In the preceding letter I attempted to prove that the last supposition is the truth. I now proceed to justify the inference from it, and to examine what you have said on this branch of the subject.

Your answer to the question now before us is as follows: "This rite is to be celebrated *by all professing Christians*, who are arrived at years of discretion. "In nothing (say you) that I have read to you, (and "I have read to you every thing that relates to it in "the New Testament) can you find *any other* qualification required [than professing christianity I "suppose you mean] and therefore what right have

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“ Christians of this day to insist upon any other ?” (p. 28.) Give me leave to ask you, Sir, what you mean by *professing* christianity. I must own myself at a loss to conceive what is here meant by it, since in the very next page you say “ a previous declaration” (or profession, for both the words are of the same import, and you yourself use them promiscuously) “ of a man’s being a Christian, is by no means necessary. “ This action is *itself* the declaration, and a more solemn one than any other.” You must excuse me if I say these two passages are directly contrary to each other. Which of them you will abide by I must guess from the general strain of your book. This leads me to fix upon the latter, and therefore obliges me to correct your definition of the persons duly qualified for the Lord’s Supper by striking out the word *professing*, and reading it, *all Christians*, i. e. all who believe that Jesus is a teacher sent from God, without regard to their moral character, save only (what you bethought yourself to add in a parenthesis, four pages afterwards, p. 33.) that they must be free from scandalous vices. That I have not misrepresented your meaning appears plain from the following passage (among others) which I find under your head of abuses which have crept into this institution, “ — Upon this, the terms of communion began to be “ more strict, and a greater purity of heart and life “ than was before required, was now thought absolutely necessary.” (p. 42.) You then introduce *Origen* with evident disapprobation as saying, “ It does not “ belong to every one to eat of this bread and drink “ of this cup. They must have been both baptized, “ believe the articles of the Christian faith, and accordingly *live holy and pious lives.*” You go on, “ This *advance* being made, &c.” evidently representing *Origen’s* account of the matter as an innovation. I shall now lay before you my reasons for believing it is the truth.

The

The first I shall mention is, that it best agrees with the nature of the ordinance, and the profession implied in attending upon it.

As to the ordinance itself, I have before attempted to prove that it contains a declaration on God's part of his readiness to bestow certain blessings purchased by his Son's death, and promised in the covenant of grace; which may all be considered as included in what our Lord mentions, in the words of the institution as the great end of his shedding his blood, *The remission of sins*. Now it seems unreasonable to suppose that any have a right to, or can with propriety receive, the outward signs of those spiritual blessings, or the seal or token of that covenant in which they are contained, but those who are interested in the blessings themselves represented thereby: on the contrary supposition, they lose their propriety and become destitute of any meaning. But who are the persons specified in the new covenant as interested in the blessings of it? Not all that believe Jesus is the Christ, nor any but such as believe in him with the heart, as repent of sin, and live according to the gospel. It follows therefore that only such persons as these are warranted to partake of the sacramental bread and wine.

Further; the *Profession* which is made in the participation of these elements is an additional (and to me a striking) proof, that they belong only to real Christians. A person who attends this ordinance, is supposed from the nature of it as above explained to profess (and if he attends it worthily means to profess) his grateful remembrance of Christ and the unspeakable benefits procured for sinful men by his mediation, particularly by his offering himself a sacrifice for sin; his own chearful acceptance of those benefits, upon the terms on which they are offered, his hearty approbation of the grand requirements of the gospel covenant, and his resolute purpose to live according to them. No less than this you yourself, Sir, include in

this profession when you say, "It implies a resolution "to live and die like a Christian." But can all that believe the truth of christianity honestly make such a profession? Can those make it, who do not heartily desire the blessings of the gospel covenant, nor inwardly relish its requirements, nor even intend to comply with them? but who, on the contrary, are yet under the power of their sins, if not of scandalous vices, yet of secret lusts, whose 'minds are carnal, and therefore at enmity with God?' which indeed is the case with all unconverted persons, whatever their outward behaviour may be. No mere nominal Christian does or can thus resolve. A resolution of this nature supposes such an hearty approbation of the laws of Christ, and such a zealous attachment to him, as are the grand characteristics of a real Christian; or a truly good man.

This observation seems to me to destroy that distinction on which the author of the *Plain Account* has laid so much stress, between a person's being himself worthy or pious, and his exercising dispositions worthy of, or suited to the nature of the Lord's Supper. How an unholy man can exercise holy dispositions is to me inconceivable, since that which constitutes a person holy or unholy, is his being possessed of, or his wanting, those dispositions which are required to be exercised in attending this institution.

There is another passage in your performance, in which you seem not only to allow the necessity of exercising pious dispositions, but of possessing a pious character in order to have a right to the Lord's Supper. Speaking of the preparation necessary for it (p. 35.) you say, "this act of religion only requires "that serious and composed state of mind, which is "a temper that a GOOD MAN, *who never indulges* "himself in any criminal excesses, habitually carries "about with him." I should be glad to know, Sir, what sort of a person you intend by a *good man*, if not such

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such an one as I am endeavouring to prove is the only fit person to receive this ordinance. I cannot see, with what propriety a *wicked man* can be called by this name (and such every man is, who is not holy in heart and life) or how any other than a real Christian, can be said “habitually to carry about
“ with him a serious and composed state of mind.” In a word, I only contend for the necessity of such qualifications in a communicant as you here describe.

Now if the exercise of such holy dispositions as I have described, be necessary to intitle any one to the Lord’s Supper, and be professed in attending upon it; and if it be true that no unholy person can exercise them, not being possessed of them; I infer, that those who attend the Lord’s Supper while they remain unholy, as they solemnly profess a falsehood, ‘eat and
‘ drink unworthily;’ from whence it seems most clearly to follow, that all unholy persons ought to refrain from this ordinance till a thorough change takes place in them, lest they ‘eat and drink judgment to
‘ themselves :’ unless it be supposed that it is better to receive unworthily, and declare what is absolutely false, than wholly to neglect the ordinance; which appears to me too unreasonable to need confutation.

You apprehend that there is no danger in a person’s coming to the Lord’s table who is destitute of a truly christian temper. “If I be asked (you say, p. 34.) whether it be not hazardous for a person of a
“ dubious or indifferent character to receive the Lord’s
“ Supper, I answer, you may judge for yourselves
“ by considering, that receiving the Lord’s Supper is
“ the same thing as standing up in the face of the
“ world and saying *I am a Christian.*” You ought to have added, (and to make you consistent I must suppose you intended to include,) what you had before said such a declaration implied, “*And I resolve
“ (by the grace of God) to live and die as becomes a
“ Christian.*” You go on “This declaration cer-
“ tainly implies an obligation to live as becomes a
“ Christian,

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“ Christian, and therefore if the person who makes
 “ it be a bad man, he will be more inexcusable than
 “ if he had not *been a Christian*, and could not have
 “ made that declaration.” That is not the matter in
 debate, Sir : The question to be decided is, whether
 a bad man, who by attending the Lord’s Supper so-
 lemnly declares he is a Christian, and not only *obliged*
 but *resolved to live like a Christian*, be not more inex-
 cusable than one (in other respects equally bad) who
 had not made such a declaration ; or whether such an
 one does not involve himself in greater guilt than he
 would otherwise have been chargeable with. You
 proceed thus : “ but if a man be in fact a Christian,
 “ the obligation to a christian-like behaviour is much
 “ the same whether he declare his belief of chri-
 “ stianity before the world or not.”* That is to say,
 His declaring himself a Christian in the most solemn
 manner possible, so as to profess his resolution to live
 and die as becomes a Christian, brings him under no
 stronger obligation to a christian-like behaviour than
 a mere private opinion that christianity is a divine re-
 ligion, and such a profession in a bad man is no ag-
 gravation of his guilt. If this be true, it will follow,
 that it is impossible for a person by any profession of
 religion to bring himself under a stronger obligation
 to an holy life, than the mere belief of christianity
 brings him under, or to expose himself to greater
 guilt, or more aggravated punishment than he would
 incur by disobedience to the gospel alone, without
 any profession at all : which appears to me as con-
 trary to sound reason, as I hope hereafter to shew it is
 to the common language of scripture. In order to
 illustrate and vindicate the passage quoted above, you
 add

* This is not quite consistent with p. 56, where you call upon us to “ *strengthen* this obligation by a public profession.” Upon which (by the way) so much stress is laid throughout the New Testament, that those who do not make it are excluded from the Christian character. So that “ being in fact a Christian, and not “ declaring it to the world,” is a case not to be supposed. See Mat. x. 32. Rom. x. 9, &c.

add, "The one is only a more solemn thing than the other, but precisely of the same nature. They differ only as a common assertion and an oath, which are both, in a manner, of equal obligation upon an honest man." I was greatly at a loss for some time to see the force of your reasoning here, for want of knowing what are the two things between which you are making the comparison. Those immediately preceding are "a man's declaring his belief of christianity to the world, and his not declaring it." For you next add, "the one is only more solemn than the other." The mere absurdity of such a comparison induced me (after several times reading the passage) to look back thro' the last sentence of full ten lines, to the preceding; where I found what I suppose must be the things compared, viz. "The receiving the Lord's Supper—and standing up in the face of the world and saying, I am a Christian." These you say are the same thing. To these I imagine you must refer when you say, "The one is only a more solemn thing than the other." But pray, Sir, does not the greater solemnity of any profession proportionably increase the obligation to act according to it, and enhance the sin of violating it? The Lord's Supper you say differs only from saying *I am a Christian* as an oath differs from a common assertion. But is there no difference between these two? You allow the one is more solemn than the other? It is universally esteemed so, and therefore preferred for the greater security. Is not the obligation to truth therefore, and the guilt of falsehood, greater in the former than in the latter? Supposing then that receiving the Lord's Supper were the same thing as standing up in the face of the world and saying, I am a Christian, since, as yourself allow, this is a more *solemn* way of making such a declaration, there is "a greater hazard" in a person's making it this way, who is "of a dubious or indifferent character," than in his merely saying he is a Christian. I must own I would

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would not advise a person of a dubious or indifferent character (especially one whom I knew to be irreligious) to stand up in the face of the world and say, I am a Christian ; much less to attend the Lord's Supper, tho' I looked upon it as only saying the same thing in a more solemn manner. Would it not be adviseable in such an one to defer declaring his christianity to the world, till his conduct should speak the same language ?

But I must dissent from you when you say " the " one is the same as the other," and must here again beg leave to remind you, that you yourself have, in another part of your book, pointed out an essential difference, where you tell us that attending the Lord's Supper is not merely declaring that a person is a Christian, but that " he is *resolved* to live and die as becomes a Christian." Now this declaration no one can with propriety make but a person who is so resolved. If therefore any one makes it who is not so resolved, he is (as I have before shewed) guilty of a solemn falsehood, he eats and drinks unworthily. Will you say then that a man of an indifferent character runs no greater hazard in attending this institution, than he would in making a mere simple declaration that he believed the gospel ? These two things differ from each other, not as an oath differs from a common assertion, but as a person's declaring his belief of any truth, and his taking an oath that he will act suitably to such a conviction. In confirmation of your opinion you further say, " Besides, coming in a constant way to a place of Christian " worship is, in fact, a publick declaration of a man's " christianity, and therefore lays him under the same " obligation." This I must beg leave to deny, since attending publick worship is no where in scripture spoken of as a proof of a man's christianity ; nor does it in its own nature imply a declaration of it, (much less of his resolution to live like a christian) since it is easy to conceive how an unbeliever may commendably

ably attend a place of Christian worship in order to judge concerning the Christian faith, or even to unite in those parts of the service which are agreeable to the religion of nature. And it is well known that many congregations among the Dissenters are become so rational and complaisant, and their publick worship conducted upon such very catholic principles, that a sober Deist might with propriety attend upon it, and would meet with much less disgust than one of your old-fashioned Christians. But would not such a person make a distinction between the ordinary parts of publick worship and the Lord's Supper, which he would consider as the distinguishing badge of Christianity, which, if he had any conscience at all, he would refuse to wear; and would not he think himself injured by having his attendance on publick worship construed as proof of his being a Christian? Since this is a duty dictated by the light of nature, and therefore widely differs from receiving the Lord's Supper, which is peculiar to christianity. And we believe that the attendance upon it not only necessarily implies a person's being a Christian, but is divinely appointed as a publick testimony of it, which publick worship is not. Your conclusion, therefore, that they are equally hazardous, is false, and a man of a dubious or indifferent character has (contrary to your inference) more reason to be afraid of coming to the Lord's Supper, than of attending publick worship.

If it should here be said, as it often has been, "that tho' a man of such a character cannot so well answer the end of this ordinance as a truly good man, yet he ought not for that reason to absent himself from this part of publick worship any more than from publick prayer or praise, or hearing the word of God, neither of which a man of a bad or dubious character can so properly attend upon as a good man;" I answer, the Lord's Supper seems to me to differ from all

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other institutions, and indeed one would naturally suppose in theory that the divine wisdom in appointing it would require it should have some end peculiar to itself. If the above representation of it be just, its difference from other religious services is very obvious. And particularly if that be true which I have been endeavouring to prove, that an unholy person by attending it professes a falsehood, and thereby aggravates his guilt, the inference is very natural that such an one ought to refrain from attending this rite till his character corresponds with the nature of it.

If it should be urged, “ That those who are not as
 “ yet truly pious may lawfully come to the Lord’s
 “ Supper as a means to make them so, and ought to
 “ be encouraged to do it with this view ; since it has
 “ this tendency, and has had this effect ;” I answer, this would be acting contrary to an established and well-known scripture-maxim, which forbids us to ‘ do evil that good may come.’ This were to invent an use of this ordinance for which we have no warrant, in the room of that which divine wisdom has appointed, and which indeed results from its very nature. It is, as you have allowed, a profession of something that we are already, and therefore not a means of something else. The institution is not designed to *beget* holy dispositions which had no being before, it requires the *exercise* of them, and therefore supposes the being of them already. Those who attend it without them (according to the foregoing reasoning) attend it unworthily, and therefore in the degree in which they do so, eat and drink judgment to themselves by declaring what is not true. It is not therefore to be expected that their receiving should be the means of their conversion. Indeed wicked men cannot be supposed to attend upon it with this view, nor can the Almighty be expected to render an ordinance instrumental in promoting an end to which he has not appointed it as a means. That the actual receiving
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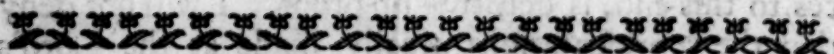
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the Lord's Supper has a tendency to convert the unconverted, or that it has been effectual in any instances to this end, is destitute of proof. I will not deny that the representations usually made at the Lord's table of the love of Christ, of the evil of the sin, &c. may have a tendency, and may have been effectual, to excite serious convictions in the minds of the ungodly, which have ended in a true conversion to God; but it does not appear that *the act of receiving* the sacramental bread and wine has ever been, or is likely to be, of real use in this view; it is easy to conceive that the same end might as well be answered by a bare attendance while the ordinance is administered, without an actual participation of it. Besides, let it be further observed, that if there be any thing in this argument for unconverted persons to attend the Lord's Supper, it will be equally conclusive with regard to sinners of all characters, even the most abandoned and profane, who have at least equal need with others to attend every probable means of reformation. But it is on all sides agreed that such ought not to approach the table of the Lord; the argument therefore, by proving too much, proves nothing at all.

I am, Rev. S I R,

Your's, &c;

L. E T-



L E T T E R V.

Reverend S I R,

IN proving that unholy persons have no right to the Lord's Supper and ought not to attend upon it, I have hitherto only argued from Reason upon the nature of the ordinance, and the profession implied in the celebration of it. I now proceed to the further vindication of the point by arguments drawn from *Scripture*.

I do not here pretend to produce any passage in which it is expressly asserted that none but real Christians ought to approach the Lord's table: I acknowledge there is not one such in the whole New Testament. But it does not follow from hence that the doctrine is unscriptural. * It is sufficient to support it, if it can be made to appear that the scripture furnishes us with such general directions, prohibitions or reproofs as may warrantably be applied, thro' a similitude of circumstances, to this particular case; or if it may be deduced, by just inference, from any thing therein expressly asserted. That we have ample evidence of this kind in scripture with respect to the present question, is to me indisputably clear.

* See LETTER I.

The first argument I shall produce is this: The scripture not only requires uprightness in every religious service, and condemns all external performances, without it, as vain; but also forbids all false professions and hypocritical pretences, and represents them as displeasing to God and as aggravations of a person's guilt. All lying and falsehood of every kind, is strictly forbidden and severely threatened, whatever the pretences for it may be. Now since *actions* have as expressive a language as *words*, and either truth or falsehood may be declared thereby with equal strength; since the action of receiving the Lord's Supper (according to your own account of it) "is a declaration of a man's resolution, by the grace of God, to live and die like a Christian," and since (as I have already proved) none but good men do or can thus resolve; it follows, that mere nominal Christians, by engaging in this action, are guilty of solemnly declaring a falsehood, so that they are virtually forbidden to engage in this action, till by a change in them, the language of it shall be the truth.

But further; the scripture particularly reproves those that make a profession of *Religion* while they are destitute of the power of it, and represents such a profession as criminal and dangerous. By a *profession of religion*, I would not here be understood to mean, an attendance on public worship in general, much less a decent external carriage, both of which are commendable even where there is nothing more; but such a profession as amounts to a solemn declaration of a man's being truly religious. Such an one I take the celebration of the Lord's Supper to be, and nothing less than this is implied in your account of it, just now referred to. Now the making such a solemn declaration as I have before shown is made in this institution, of subjection to the authority of Christ, of entering into covenant with God thro' him, of a re-

ation to his church, and of a resolution, by divine grace, to walk as becomes a member of it, while the heart really means no such thing, and the soul is averse to the purity of the gospel; seems to me strongly condemned and strictly forbidden by such passages as the following: ‘When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with, *it is iniquity*, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth, they are a trouble unto me. I am weary to bear them.* Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee.’† To the same purpose are some passages in the New Testament, particularly that parable of our Lord concerning the Wedding Supper, ‡ which I the rather quote at large, as you have excepted against it as foreign to the purpose. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son,——and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a *wedding-garment*; and he saith unto him, Friend, *how camest thou in hither*, not having a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ The manner in which you speak of this parable, carries in it an insinuation, that those who apply it to the case of the Lord’s Supper, do it without sufficient warrant, and upon a mistaken view of the ordinance. §

“ They [communicants having conceived of it as a
“ solemn

* Isa. i. 12—14. † Psal. L. 16, 17. ‡ Matt. xxii. § p. 41.

“solemn thing to come to the Lord’s table] would
 “also apply the parable of our Saviour concerning
 “the wedding supper, and consider the person who
 “had not on the wedding-garment as representing
 “an unworthy communicant.” And pray where is
 the absurdity of this? Do you say our Saviour, by
 the wedding supper, did not intend the *Lord’s Sup-*
per? It is granted he did not. I know of none, and
 you can hardly suppose any, weak enough to think
 that he did. You might as well imagine that I sup-
 pose this ordinance to be referred to in the scriptures
 quoted above from the Old Testament. But because
 the Lord’s Supper is not particularly intended in any
 of these passages, shall it be said, they ought not to
 be applied to it? With as much reason might you
 except against applying them to any religious duty at
 all, because no one is immediately referred to. They
 relate to a religious profession in general, and there-
 fore are justly applicable to any particular part of it,
 that implies a declaration of a man’s piety; more
 especially to the most solemn and express part of it,
 which you acknowledge the Lord’s Supper to be.
 The man in the parable without the wedding-garment,
 well represents the case of those in general, who make
 a publick and solemn profession of Christianity, but
 are destitute of the inward power of it, or of the ge-
 nuine temper of Christians; which character is exactly
 the same with that of an unworthy communicant, to
 whom, with every insincere professor, may that part
 of the parable also be applied, which represents the
 king’s displeasure against the bold intruder, ‘How
 ‘camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding gar-
 ‘ment? Take him, bind him hand and foot,’ &c. It
 will doubtless be ‘more intolerable in the day of
 ‘judgment for such’ as have added lying and hypo-
 crisy to all their other sins, than for those who in other
 respects are equally guilty, but have made no such
 profession. I will only add one passage more under

this head, and that is what Solomon has asserted concerning vows in general, (of which you have in effect allowed the Lord's Supper to be one species) 'Better
 " it is that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou
 " shouldst vow and not pay.'* From a careful attention to these passages, and soberly reasoning on the nature of the Lord's Supper, let our readers judge, whether that sentiment be not just rather than censurable, which you ascribe to some communicants, of whom you say (p. 42.) " the greater they supposed to
 " be the honour and advantage of communicating
 " worthily, the greater would they suppose to be the
 " penalty and danger of communicating unworthily."
 A second argument from scripture I derive from the directions therein given with respect to EXCOMMUNICATION. It must, I think, be universally allowed, that those persons ought not to be admitted as members of a church, who, if they were already admitted, would deserve to be excommunicated from it. You yourself, Sir, have taught me thus to argue, when speaking of the persons fit for communion, you say (p. 34.) " I do not here speak of those
 " vices which are a scandal to human society, and
 " which, according to the judgment of St. Paul, will
 " justify excommunication." What vices you would call a scandal to human society, I am not quite certain. One might naturally rank under this head, all open immoralities habitually indulged. But in your *Letter to Mr. Venn* (p. 42.) you seem as if you intended only the grossest crimes of which human nature can be guilty. " We do not find (say you) that
 " merely nominal Christians were excluded from the
 " Lord's Supper, this was *only* the case with the *incestuous* person at Corinth." Surely you forgot that in the very same chapter in which the Apostle exhorts the Corinthians to put away from among them a particular person who was found guilty of incest, he also warrants them to exclude all such as
 they

thy might hereafter find chargeable with other immoralities of a less heinous nature. ‘ I have written unto you (says he) not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat.’ By *eating* here I have no doubt the Apostle meant receiving the Lord’s Supper. But supposing the expression refers to a common friendly meal, we may naturally infer, communion in a Christian ordinance with such a person must have been more unwarrantable; for the arguments against the former would conclude much stronger against the latter. Now if a Christian church be forbid holding fellowship with such sinners as are here specified, we may by a parity of reason add to the list *all* openly immoral persons, all who walk unsuitably to a Christian profession, as equally unworthy of, and unfit for, this privilege. The justice of such an inference I think you will not dispute, and there are other passages of scripture which confirm it; particularly that exhortation to the *Thessalonians* to ‘ withdraw from any that walked disorderly, from idle persons and busy bodies.’ Now if a church be warranted to refuse communion with those whom they know to be immoral, I infer, that they who *know themselves* to be so, tho’ it be unknown to others, are as really disqualified for this ordinance as if their immoralities were publick, and ought in conscience to abstain from it. Why is it that the church is forbid to have fellowship with a person who is guilty of “ such vices as are a scandal to human society ?” Is it merely because his vices are publickly known and of a scandalous nature ? Or because he thereby the more openly declares to the world that he is really unholy, and therefore unfit for so holy an institution ? It is, I apprehend, the immorality *itself* in which his disqualification principally

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* 2 Theff. iii. 6, &c. See also Matt. xviii. 15—17. Rom. xvi. 17.

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pally consists, tho' it is its being *publick* that renders it apparent, and gives the church the plainer warrant to deny him communion. It is true, an *openly* immoral person, whose vices are a scandal to society, would be (as you suggest concerning the incestuous person) "a *disgrace* to the Christian name," which a more secret sinner might not; so that the former would be more unfit for fellowship with a society of Christians than the latter, and there would be a stronger obligation upon them to exclude him, as the credit of religion would be more concerned; for the *openness* of his vices would afford the world evidence of the badness of his character, and would expose the whole society, to the charge of encouraging immorality; so that the ways of God would be in danger of being evil spoken of, and men would be taught, (as they were by the iniquity of *El's* sons) to 'abhor the offering of the Lord.' Nevertheless, it is the immorality of the man's character, that renders him disqualified; it is this that constitutes him unworthy in the sight of God; it is this in which the scandal and offence consist: For, the honour of religion would be as much hurt in the world, and the church of Christ would suffer as much discredit, if it could be known that they held communion with one who was guilty of *secret* vices, (tho' his outward behaviour were unexceptionable,) as if they permitted an *openly* immoral person to communicate with them. And let it be further considered, that the scripture not merely requires Christians to exclude those who are guilty of *publick* immoralities, and such as would bring a scandal upon religion in the eye of the world, but also such as have given evidence of a more *private* nature that they are not possessed of a truly Christian temper. In a passage before quoted, they are ordered to withdraw from those that *walk disorderly* in general, whether it be publicly known or not. And our Lord himself mentions so private a crime as

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an offence committed against one individual member of the church, if it be persisted in, as a sufficient cause of excommunication. “ If thy brother (says he) trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone — if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more — and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” * Such a fault as this would be no “ scandal to human society,” but it would be to the church a plain evidence that a man was not a real Christian, and therefore unworthy to be considered as a member of it. Now if those are to be excluded from communion with a Christian church who are convicted of any such sin as proves that they are not real Christians ; it seems to me naturally to follow, that they who are conscious to themselves of such sins, tho’ the church may be very far from suspecting it, are as really disqualified as if their characters were fully known ; and therefore they ought to abstain from that ordinance in which a relation to the church is expressed. It appears to me an absurdity to suppose that any one should have a right to the Lord’s Supper, and be warranted to attend upon it, who is conscious to himself of such vices, as, were they known to the church, would justify them in excluding him. “ What excludes a man from admission, when it is known to others, excommunicates him to his own conscience, when it is only known to himself.” † Now if this reasoning be admitted, it may easily be applied with respect to unholy persons in general, whether they are secretly guilty of iniquitous practices, or whether they habitually omit any essential duties of religion ; for in the sight of God there is but little difference in their characters,

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and

* Mat. xviii. 15—18.

† Charnock, vol. ii. p. 787.

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and their incapacity for a worthy attendance on this holy ordinance is much the same. They are neither of them true members of Christ's church, and therefore have no right to communion with it. An objection will probably be urged here, taken from the distinction between the *visible* and the *invisible* church. This distinction is indeed often made, but it has no foundation in scripture, nor can I see that it has any in reason. The church of Christ is but one. This he is said to have purchased with his blood, and this we are told he will finally 'present a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.' It consists entirely of believing, penitent, holy souls. It is indeed partly visible and partly invisible, i. e. the members of it are not with certainty known to the world; we can only judge of them by appearance, and may be deceived. Under the Mosaic dispensation there was indeed an external visible church, including all the seed of Abraham after the flesh; but the gospel knows no such thing: * it speaks only of one church, composed of true believers, called Abraham's spiritual seed. So that to speak of the visible church of Christ, as distinguished from the invisible, is at best an impropriety of speech; and it is founded on a false supposition, if any thing more be meant by it, than being *visibly* (or to appearance) of the true church of Christ; which is the case with none but those who appear to be true believers and lead holy lives. They who are known to lead unholy lives are not *visibly* members of Christ's church, and therefore the church ought to exclude them from their communion. And they who know themselves to be unholy, are no more members of the church than the others, and therefore ought to exclude themselves.

You

* See this point well argued in the *Second* of the *Theological Dissertations*, in answer to Dr. TAYLOR's *Key to the Epistles*, by JOHN ERSKINE, M. A. 1765.

You tell us in your *Letter to Mr. Venn.* (p. 41.)
 “ It is easy to gather from the writings of the A-
 “ postles, that many persons, even in their times,
 “ made profession of Christianity, and even preach-
 “ ed Christ, who, in the moral sense of the word,
 “ were not Christians.” This does not sufficiently
 appear, if there be no stronger proof of it than that
 passage affords, which you have quoted from the A-
 postle Paul, viz. ‘ I keep under my body, and bring
 ‘ it into subjection, lest that, by any means, when I
 ‘ have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-
 ‘ away.’ If this text be at all to the purpose, it
 proves that Paul at that time was not, in the moral
 sense of the word, a Christian. However admitting
 there might be *some* such professors, and that what
 you add be also true, “ That we do not find that
 “ these merely nominal Christians were excluded
 “ from the Lord’s Supper,” it does not follow from
 hence that mere nominal Christians, have a right to
 this ordinance, unless you can prove that those whom
 you speak of in the primitive times were known to be
 only nominal Christians when they were admitted to
 it; the contrary to which is, I think, sufficiently e-
 vident from what I shall have occasion to mention in
 speaking to

The *Third* argument from scripture to prove that
 only real Christians have a right to the Lord’s Sup-
 per, which is, What the sacred writers say concerning
 the characters of the members of the primitive churches
 as such. One thing must here be premised, which
 you have entirely forgot, but which is, very obvious-
 ly, of considerable importance in the present contro-
 versy, that being members of a church and receiving
 the Lord’s Supper are expressions of the same import,
 and only different ways of characterizing the same
 persons. It will, I think, be universally acknowledg-
 ed, that all those who were called Christians in the
 primitive times, and considered by Christian pastors

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as members of their respective churches, did attend the Lord's Supper, and that all who attended the Lord's Supper were considered as church-members. How else were the members of christian churches distinguished from other persons? Now if this were the case, whatsoever is said of the members of churches as such, is said of them as communicants, or receivers of the Lord's Supper; and we may thence judge concerning the qualifications requisite to a worthy attendance on this ordinance. Let us then enquire in what light the Apostles considered those churches to whom they wrote their respective epistles, whether only as consisting of persons who professed a belief that Jesus was a divine teacher, or as those who appeared to be, and by being admitted to the Lord's table were esteemed, real Christians in the highest sense, righteous and pious persons.

The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the church at *Rome*, not only speaks of the members of it as 'beloved of God and called to be saints,'^a but thanks God on account of their conversion from sin to holiness: 'God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.'^b — 'Unto the church which was at *Corinth*,' he writes as 'unto them that were sanctified in Christ Jesus, and that called upon the name of the Lord,' of which persons it is elsewhere said they 'shall be saved.'^c He speaks of them as having been formerly in the number of the chief of sinners; 'thieves, covetous, drunkards,' &c. and then adds, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.'

In his second epistle to the same church, he says 'Our hope of you is stedfast;' and speaks of them as
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^a Rom. i. 7. ^b vi. 17, 18. ^c 1 Cor. i. 2. vi. 11.

‘ the epistles of Christ known and read of all men,
 ‘ written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living
 ‘ God.’^d — In writing to the churches of *Galatia*,
 tho’ he had occasion to reprove them for an undue
 attachment to the law of Moses, he speaks of them
 as ‘ the children of God by faith in Christ, as having
 ‘ put on Christ (i. e. a Christian temper) by baptism,
 ‘ as being Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to
 ‘ the promise ;’^e and as the sons of God, into whose
 ‘ hearts God had sent the spirit of his Son, crying
 ‘ Abba Father.’^f

In his epistle to the church at *Ephesus*, he stiles
 them ‘ the saints which are at Ephesus, chosen in
 ‘ Christ, made accepted in the beloved ;’^g and speaks
 ‘ of them as having trusted in Christ, as having been
 ‘ quickened when dead in trespasses and sins.’^h —
 The *Philippians* he calls ‘ the saints which are at
 ‘ Philippi,’ and tells them he was ‘ confident of this
 ‘ very thing, that he which had begun a good work
 ‘ in them’ (which necessarily implies that they had
 been truly converted to God) ‘ would perform it
 ‘ until the day of Christ.’ⁱ He adds, ‘ even as it is
 ‘ meet to think thus of you *all*.’ — The *Colossians*
 he stiles ‘ the saints and faithful brethren in Christ
 ‘ Jesus, and gives thanks for their faith and love,
 ‘ and for the hope which was laid up for them in
 ‘ heaven.’ He represents the gospel as having brought
 ‘ forth fruit in them, since the day they heard it, and
 ‘ received the grace of God in truth ;’ and speaks of
 them as ‘ delivered from the power of darkness and
 ‘ made meet to be partakers of the glorious inheri-
 ‘ tance of the saints in light.’^k Unto the church of
 the *Thessalonians*, he declares he ‘ gave thanks to
 ‘ God always on their behalf, remembering their
 ‘ work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of
 ‘ hope in the sight of God, and that the gospel had
 ‘ come

^d Ch. iii. 2, 3. ^e Gal. iii. 26, 29. ^f iv. 6. ^g Eph. i.
^h ii. 1. ⁱ Phil. i. ^k Col. i. 12, 13.

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' come unto them not in word only, but also in
' power and in the Holy Ghost.'^k — The author of
the epistle to the Christian *Hebrews*, tho' he speaks of
some that once belonged to their churches as having
apostatized, yet says concerning the rest, ' I am per-
' suaded better things of you, and things that accom-
' pany salvation.'^l

It were easy to multiply quotations from these
epistles, and to produce passages from the remain-
ing ones of *James* and *Peter*, of *John* and *Jude*,
to the same effect with those already quoted; but
I forbear lest I should be thought too prolix, and
will only just remark, that from what Christ ordered
John to write in the book of *the Revelation* to the
churches of *Sardis* and *Laodicea*, tho' more severe
complaints are brought against them than against
any church mentioned in the whole New Testament,
yet it appears that the members of both, not only
looked upon themselves as real Christians, but were
esteemed such by others. They thought they were
' rich and needed nothing, though they were poor
' and miserable; and had a name that they lived,
' tho' they were really dead.'^m This remark may
serve to obviate an objection which might be urged
against the argument drawn from the foregoing pas-
sages, " that many of these churches had wicked
" members belonging to them, or hypocritical pro-
" fessors, tho' it be allowed that the majority of
" them were truly pious." It does not appear that
any of them were known to be bad, or even consider-
ed as dubious characters, when they were admitted as
members of the church; but, on the contrary, as
having the appearance of saints. And those who af-
terwards discovered, by an unchristian temper, or
conduct, that they were not real Christians, are spoken
of

^k 1 Theff. i. 2—5. and 2 Theff. i. 3, 7.
^l Rev. ii. 23. iii. 17.

^m Heb. vi. 9.

of as having 'crept in unawares,'^a and as 'false brethren unawares brought in.' *

Besides the arguments already produced from scripture to prove that nominal Christians ought not to attend the Lord's Supper; this point I apprehend will receive further confirmation, from a due attention to that part of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, which immediately relates to this ordinance. But the illustration of this will be so large, that I shall make it the subject of another letter.

I am, SIR,

Your's, &c.

^a Jude 4. Gal. ii. 4.

* The reader may see this argument further pursued, and the objections against the force of it removed, in a work entitled, *An humble Enquiry into the Qualifications requisite to a full Communion*, &c. by the late judicious and learned Mr. JONATHAN EDWARDS, M. A. President of the College in *New Jersey*, p. 66, &c.

L E T.

LETTER VI.

Reverend SIR,

THOU' you have thought proper to assert, that there is nothing in the whole New Testament which requires any other qualification for receiving the Lord's Supper than a belief of christianity, and a freedom from scandalous vices; I have attempted to draw, from those writings, several arguments to prove that none but truly pious persons ought to attend that institution. This point I apprehend will receive further confirmation by attending closely to what the Apostle Paul had occasion to write to the Corinthians, on account of their unbecoming behaviour at the Lord's table. Let us distinctly consider what he says with respect to unworthy receiving, and the means he recommends in order to prevent it, viz. Self-examination previous to the celebration of it.

As to the former; the Apostle declares concerning those in general who 'eat this bread and drink 'this cup unworthily' (whatever be the particular manner of doing it) that they are 'guilty of the body 'and blood of the Lord, that they come together 'unto condemnation, that they eat and drink judgment to themselves.' I have already shown that all unholy persons who attend the Lord's Supper are guilty of this, as they do not and cannot attend
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it worthily; and that therefore they are exposed to this condemnation *. By which I mean, that they incur a degree of guilt proportioned to their unworthy manner of celebrating the ordinance, and are liable to a proportionable punishment. Even good men, as far as there is any thing unworthy in their manner of attending, do so far stand chargeable with guilt before God, and are liable to be, some way or other, 'chastened of the Lord,' or to bring some kind of 'judgment to themselves' of a *spiritual* nature, tho' not to be finally 'condemned with the world.' But all unholy persons are exposed to *final* condemnation; and as by their unworthy receiving the Lord's Supper, they increase their guilt, (particularly, as we have seen, by solemnly declaring a falsehood) it follows that they aggravate their future punishment in proportion to the nature of their crime, (as they certainly do by every other sin), unless they repent. Now the just and natural inference from hence appears to my reason to be, that they ought to refrain from the Lord's Supper, while they remain unholy, in order to avoid this additional condemnation; for it is most unreasonable to suppose, that it is a man's duty to do that, the doing of which will enhance his guilt and add to his future misery. "Why then (may it probably be asked) did the Apostle leave us to *infer* this, since he had so fair an opportunity of asserting it in his address to this Corinthian church? But he did by no means declare them unfit for the ordinance, much less forbid their attending upon it any more, as might have been expected he would have done, if unholy persons had no right to it; tho' they gave plain proof that they were not truly pious, but on the contrary, very profane; since they not merely turned this sacred institution into a common meal, but were guilty of such indecency and excess as were unbecoming and criminal on *any* occasion, being

* See Letter IV. p. 42.

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“ing charged even with *drunkenness* itself; a sin which “Christianity threatens with damnation.” As this has been often urged as an argument against the necessity of real holiness in order to the worthy receiving the Lord’s Supper; it is requisite that I should take some notice of it here, tho’ you have not urged it; which I the rather do, as I know not that it has ever been refuted.

It must be acknowledged, if it could be clearly proved that these Corinthians were bad men, it would afford a plausible argument against the doctrine which I am defending; but the proof of this does not sufficiently appear. On the contrary, to me it seems abundantly evident that they were in general, to appearance, pious persons, or that they had a *visibilty* of godliness. What else can we reasonably conclude from the character which the Apostle gives of them in the beginning of his epistle, part of which we have already quoted. He not only calls them ‘the sanctified ‘in Christ Jesus,’ but tells them that he ‘thanked ‘God always on their behalf, that in every thing ‘they were enriched by him, and in all utterance, ‘and in all knowledge, and that they came behind ‘in no spiritual gift, waiting for the coming of our ‘Lord Jesus Christ, who (says he) shall confirm you ‘unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day ‘of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I am quite at a loss to know the Apostle’s meaning, if he does not intend in these words to represent them as real Christians. Nor can I see any thing in his account of their manner of celebrating the Lord’s Supper inconsistent with the supposition that they were truly pious, or that could have been sufficient to ground a charge upon any individuals as ungodly persons. It cannot reasonably be thought that they really considered the Lord’s Supper as designed in no other view than as a publick entertainment, or that they had utterly forgot that it was a memorial of Christ and a religious institution.

tution. Their fault I apprehend to have been precisely this: they did not sufficiently distinguish the external part of this religious rite from a common meal, but eat and drank, and most probably conversed together in the same manner as was customary in their other publick feasts. This is called by the Apostle, 'not discerning (or discriminating) the Lord's body.' But this, tho' in some degree criminal, was by far more excusable than it would be in any christian society in the present day, and was greatly alleviated by the consideration of their not having a written account of the original institution, the gospels not being at that time penned; and was the less to be wondered at, as it was necessary for the Apostle himself to have an express revelation from heaven concerning the true nature and design of this ordinance. Besides, they might the more easily fall into this impropriety of conforming the Lord's Supper to a common meal, as it was usually celebrated immediately after one, and was so in the first institution of it.

As to the *indecenty* these Corinthians are said to have been guilty of at the Lord's table, some beginning to eat before others came, &c. this was the natural consequence of their not distinguishing the Lord's Supper (as to the outward form of it) from one of their common entertainments, at which the like rudeness frequently obtained in those times, which were (as you justly observe) remarkable for the want of modern politeness at their social meals, of which Grecian historians have complained. But what is laid the greatest stress upon in this argument is, that it is said of some of these communicants, that *they were drunken*. To this I answer, that the Greek word *μεθυσται* does not necessarily signify being *intoxicated* with liquor, but will easily admit of a softer term, and may be translated *drinks to excess*, or *drinks plentifully*; meaning, that they had drank a larger quantity

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of wine than was necessary or proper at the table of the Lord; tho' no more than was lawful at their own *. This sense of the word well agrees with the general accusation brought against them, viz. their attending this rite as if it had been a common entertainment. And this is confirmed by the manner in which the Apostle reproves them: 'What, have ye not houses to eat in? — Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. — Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another, and if any man hunger, let him eat at home.' How different is the Apostle's language from what we may naturally suppose it would have been if they had been guilty of the sin of drunkenness, tho' only in their own houses, much more in the house of God and at the table of the Lord. Nay, if that had been the case, they would have been guilty of one of those scandalous vices which you say deserve excommunication, and therefore the Apostle would not merely have *reproved* them with the utmost severity, but ordered them to be *cut off from the church*; for in this very epistle he had before given orders for the excommunication of the incestuous person, and warranted their proceeding to the exclusion of any members of their church who should be guilty of any immoralities, among which it is observable he mentions *drunkenness*. According to this warrant then, the persons in question, if they had been guilty of drunkenness at all (much more at the table of the Lord) would not only have deserved excommunication, but would in fact have been excommunicated. But it is plain

* In this sense the word is evidently used John ii. 10. 'Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have *well drunk* [pub. trans.] i. e. *drank pretty freely*, so as to exhilarate the spirits: — Otherwise we make our Lord to encourage, by his first miracle, a drunken revel. Gen. xliii. 34. Cant. v. 1. and Hag. i. 6. are instances to the present purpose, the LXX making use of the word in question in each of these places. See DODDR. *Fam. Exp.* on John ii. 10. note.

plain this was so far from being the case, that they were not so much as suspended. It follows therefore by the most natural consequence, that they were not guilty of drunkenness, and therefore, notwithstanding this excess, might be truly good men.

But if it appeared ever so clearly that some of them were really drunken at the table of the Lord, it would be to no purpose in the present argument, for it would prove too much. If they drank to such excess as to be intoxicated, and are hereby proved wicked men, they were guilty of a *scandalous vice*; and it would follow, not only that unholy men, but even scandalous sinners—drunkards, (and by parity of reason all other openly immoral persons) might attend this ordinance; a consequence which you are as much concerned to avoid as we are. Thus then it appears, that these Corinthians, notwithstanding their irregularity, might be truly pious persons; so that their not being forbidden to attend upon the Lord's Supper is no argument for the right of any unholy persons to it, (as has been pleaded) and what the Apostle wrote to them concerning the guilt and danger of receiving unworthily, concludes against an unholy person's communicating, tho' it did not against their's.

I now go on to observe further from this passage, that the means which the Apostle recommends to avoid the sin and condemnation of unworthily receiving the Lord's Supper, viz. *Self-examination*, previous to the celebration of it, affords an additional argument in favour of the doctrine I am defending. 'But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup.' Your paraphrase upon these words I can by no means acquiesce in: "Let him consider with himself *that he comes*" [I suppose you meant to say, *that he should come*, or, *in order that he may come*] "to this supper" "as to a remembrance of Christ, and not as to a

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“common feast.” By what authority you render *δοκιμαζέτω ἑαυτὸν* *consider with himself*, I am at a loss to find, and should have been glad if you had informed us. With all due deference to your known skill in the Greek language, I must maintain, that the proper meaning of *δοκιμαζέτω* is to prove, try, or examine, as gold is tried by the touchstone. Accordingly wheresoever it occurs in the New Testament it is translated by one or other of these words, (unless, when used metonymically, it signifies to *discern, approve, allow, &c.* which suppose a previous trial) and often has a particular reference to a man’s religious character. This is the case in Paul’s Second Epistle to these Corinthians (xiii. 5.) ‘Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, prove your own selves, &c.’ But I have another authority for thus translating the word in the passage before us, which you cannot decently dispute, and that is your own. In another part of your work (forgetting your rendering of the word here) in order to serve a different purpose, you give it the sense I am pleading for. Speaking against the right of ministers or congregations to enquire into the lives of those that propose themselves to communion, “men are directed (say you p.33.) to *examine* themselves, but “the minister is not directed to *examine* them;” where, by the word *examine*, you must necessarily mean, enquiring into themselves, or else it is not sense. You do indeed include in a parenthesis these words, “tho’ then only with a view to distinguish “this ordinance from a common meal;” but it matters not what is the thing enquired into, as the meaning of the word *examine* is exactly the same, whether it relate to a man’s knowledge or his religious character. If you are willing to abide by your last translation of the word in question, but maintain that the passage is only an exhortation to the Corinthians to enquire, whether they distinguished the Lord’s Sup-
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per from a common meal, I will now give you my reasons for thinking that this is not and cannot be the Apostle's meaning. The first is, that this exhortation is a general one, and no more confined to the Corinthians, than we have already seen the case of unworthy receiving was. The Apostle had just before declared, '*Whosoever* shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord;' q. d. let him do it in what way soever he may. Then follows the exhortation we are considering: 'But let a man (i. e. *every man*) examine himself, and so let him eat.' As a further proof of the general nature of this exhortation, let it be observed, that the *motive* immediately subjoined is general: 'for he (q. d. *whosoever* he be) that eateth and drinketh unworthily (i. e. whatever be the particular manner of doing it) eateth and drinketh judgment to himself.' The meaning of the Apostle, therefore, in this exhortation to self-examination, must be this, that since it was so dangerous a thing to receive the Lord's Supper unworthily, every person ought to examine himself, previous to his receiving it, in order to know whether there was any thing in him amiss of any kind whatsoever, which would expose him to this danger, that so it might be rectified: Neither the words themselves, nor the connection of them, require any limitation; so that this examination may as naturally be applied in reference to a person's religious character in general as to any thing else: it is therefore unwarrantable to confine it to the distinguishing the Lord's Supper from a common meal.

But I must further observe, it appears to me very irrational to refer it to *this* at all, for the two following reasons. The one is, that there could be no necessity for any persons to examine themselves whether they considered the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of Christ, or only as a common meal; since this might easily be known without examination, and will scarce-

ly admit of it. What can be named that is more properly the subject of intuition than this? Besides, (as was before hinted,) it is not to be supposed that the Corinthians were, (or indeed that any Christians should be) so grossly ignorant, as really to consider the Lord's Supper as only a common meal; and not to know that it was a religious institution in remembrance of Christ: especially since Paul himself had resided amongst them a year and half, in which time he doubtless had often administered this ordinance to them, in doing which he must have given them at least a general idea of its nature and design. This is suggested, ver. 23. where he speaks of his having before *delivered* to them what he had received of the Lord Jesus. Nay, you find he expressly commends them for their *knowledge* (among other attainments) which he certainly would not have done if they had been so ignorant as you suppose them to have been; not to insist that all further examination on this head must have been superseded by the knowledge which the Apostle *now* gave them in this epistle. But I must further remark, that your account of the object of this self enquiry makes the Apostle guilty of a manifest absurdity in exhorting them to it; since it supposes them to have the previous knowledge of what he exhorts them to examine themselves about, *viz.* that the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ and not a common meal. For a man to examine himself whether he knows this, in order to judge whether he has knowledge enough to receive the Lord's Supper, is making that to be the rule of judgment, which is the object of enquiry.

In order to make the Apostle speak rationally, we must suppose, that what he exhorts persons to examine themselves about, is something with which they are not sufficiently acquainted already; something which is not obvious to them without self-examination; something about which it is possible and easy to deceive themselves; neither of which agree with
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their understanding the Lord's Supper *to be* the Lord's Supper and not a common meal; whereas all these well agree with the supposition of his referring to the state of the mind with regard to religion, and with no other that I can think of but this: Which indeed I should imagine to be the first that would offer itself to an indifferent enquirer, as it appears in itself highly rational and well to suit the connexion of the discourse. Now if it be true that the Apostle in this passage meant to exhort persons, previous to their coming to the Lord's table, to examine themselves whether they are in the faith, or whether they are real Christians, we have here a full proof that such are the only persons who have a right to attend it *. 'Let a man examine himself, and SO let him eat.' It cannot with any shadow of reason be supposed that

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* Mr. Locke's paraphrase on the words is this: "By this institution therefore of Christ, let a man examine himself; and according to that let him eat."—To which he adds the following note: "These words (*καὶ ὅτως*) as to the letter, are rightly translated *and so*. But that translation, I imagine, leaves generally a wrong sense of the place in the mind of an English reader, as if they signified no more, but that examination should precede, and eating follow, q. d. *Let a man examine, and then let him eat*; which I take to be quite different from the meaning of the Apostle, whose sense the whole design of the context shews to be this: "I have here set before you the institution of Christ; by that let a man examine his carriage, and according to that let him eat; let him conform the manner of his eating to that." The use which I have made of this text is not at all inconsistent with this interpretation of it; for if the ordinance be of such a nature as to require real holiness, those who examine themselves by it, will see the necessity of holiness in order to the worthy receiving of it, and infer that they ought to receive it, or abstain from it, according as they find themselves holy or unholy. If it should be said that *Mr. Locke* only meant, and the passage only signifies, that every one should ask himself what is the nature of the ordinance, in order that he may attend it suitably to its nature; I answer, this were not so properly a man's examining himself, as examining the ordinance; the former of which is what the passage enjoins; whereas if the Apostle had intended the latter, he would doubtless have used some such expression as Dr. Priestley has put into his mouth, *Let him consider with himself, &c.*

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self-examination can of itself give any man a qualification for the Lord's Supper ; it is proposed as the means of knowing whether he be duly qualified or not. If hereupon he find that he is, by discovering in himself the essential marks of a true Christian, he is warranted to eat of this bread and drink of this cup ; but, if not, he is as strongly forbidden to do it as he could have been in a direct prohibition. It is as if it had been said, " Since there is danger of receiving unworthily, let no man receive without having first examined himself whether he be duly qualified, i. e. whether he be a true Christian, and proved himself to be one, or *approved* himself to his own conscience as such."

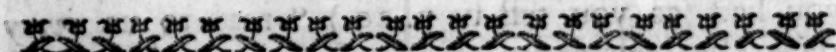
If it should be objected against this sense of the passage, " that there appears to be no propriety in the Apostle's addressing such an exhortation to these Corinthians, who are supposed to have been good men : " I answer, the exhortation (as I before observed) was not particularly addressed to *them* to whom the reproof had been given, but is a general advice founded on what had been said on unworthy receiving in general. Or if it should be thought most natural to consider the advice as addressed to these very persons *among others*, it may be allowed (very consistently with what has been advanced concerning their piety in general, and the impossibility of fixing the charge of impiety upon any individuals) that the Apostle might have some secret suspicion, that in so disorderly a church there might be *some*, whose hearts were not right with God, and who had not those spiritual views in attending this ordinance which the nature of it requires ; the want of which might probably be, in a great measure, the first occasion of their irregularities.

Thus, Sir, I have attempted to shew, that those Dissenters who maintain that a mere belief of the gospel and a freedom from scandalous vices, are not the
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only qualifications for the Lord's Supper, have greater foundation both in reason and scripture for their opinion than you have represented. Whether you had (as you tell us p. 29.) "read to us *every thing* that relates to this question in the New Testament," or whether you have properly interpreted those you have produced, let our readers now judge.

I am, SIR,

Your's, &c.



L E T T E R VII.

Rev. SIR,

AFTER having considered what are the necessary qualifications for receiving the Lord's Supper, it is natural to enquire, (as I now propose doing) who are the proper *judges* of them? Is every man the sole judge for himself in this case, and are all persons at full liberty to come to this ordinance, who choose to do so, whatsoever their views, or their characters may be? Or has a Christian church a right to be satisfied whether those that offer themselves to communion be duly qualified, and to exclude those who appear not to be so? I cannot conceive why a society of Christians, should be supposed to differ from all other societies, in a particular of essential importance to their honour, their liberty, their prosperity, and even to their very being: for such most certainly is the power of determining who are, and who are not fit to be members, and of excluding such as they deem unworthy. A church of Christ is a society of persons who truly believe in and obey him, and who stately meet together at the same place, to partake of his supper, as a token of their relation and subjection to him, as well as with a view to their mutual edification. Now if any one joins himself to such a society, who does not believe in Christ, or who is not obedient

ent to his commands, he is not properly a member of the church, being utterly disqualified by the laws of Christ; and if the true members of it are obliged to admit all that offer themselves; in a course of time, if there should be any secular motive, of honour or profit, the majority of such a society might be mere nominal Christians, or even profane persons, if not infidels. And when this should once be the case, 'the righteous would soon utterly cease from among them;' that which bore the name of a church of Christ would essentially differ from it; the ordinances of religion would be profaned, and most likely would soon cease to be administered. It is not sufficient to say, "Every man must answer for himself before God with respect to his views in coming to the Lord's table," for it is not merely a *personal* concern. It is entering into an important connexion with others. It is professing to become members of a society said to be 'a chosen generation, an holy nation, a peculiar people,' laid under special obligations to an holy exemplary conversation in the world; all of whom therefore must be greatly interested in the temper and deportment of the rest, since so intimate a connexion with wicked men might not only bring a reproach upon themselves and the religion of Christ, but such persons might have a very unhappy influence in the church, and greatly prevent its edification. It is fit therefore that a power should be lodged somewhere of judging concerning the qualifications of candidates for communion, and of rejecting those that appear to be destitute of them. But with whom could this be so properly intrusted, as with the members of the church themselves, whether they choose to exercise it themselves, or to commit into the hands of their pastor, or any select number of their body. Such a power, one would think the common principles of liberty would sufficiently vindicate in a church, and even require. As they claim

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no right to force any into communion, it seems unreasonable that any should force themselves. It is true, bodies of Christians, any more than individuals, 'are not their own.' The supper of which they partake is the *Lord's Supper*. So that they are to make no new terms of admission to it, but acknowledge those as sufficient which Christ has made. But it is by no means inconsistent with a due acknowledgement of him as 'the head over all things to the 'church,' to judge whether those that would be received as members of that church, be qualified according to his own laws, and to exclude such as are not. On the contrary, if he has given them this power, it is part of their duty to him to exercise it. Such a power appears to me, in theory, so reasonable, that it might be naturally expected he would have given it them; and from the New Testament records it is abundantly evident he has.

Christian churches are not only represented as voluntary societies, and the members of them considered as persons united in the strongest ties, but also as having some kind of authority over each other. Hence they are exhorted to 'submit themselves one to another.'* And such passages as the following strongly imply, that the primitive churches considered themselves as having a right to judge of the qualifications of such as offered themselves to their communion, and to refuse those that appeared not duly qualified. 'Receive ye one another as Christ also hath received us. † — I commend unto you Phebe our sister, 'that ye receive her as becometh saints.' § But this authority of the church with respect to its own members is more fully expressed in those passages which relate to excommunication, the principal of which I had occasion to quote at length in a former letter. ‡ Now by the same authority that a church may reject any from their society, after they have been received, they may, surely, refuse to admit any as mem-

* Eph. v. 21. † Rom. xv. 7. § xvi. 1, 2. ‡ See p. 53.

members of it, whom they judge equally unworthy, under what pretence soever they may desire admission. The right of refusing members stands upon the same footing with that of excommunicating them.

But why need I thus attempt to vindicate this right, when you yourself have allowed it, if there be any meaning in that passage (p. 33.) in part before quoted, in which you infer the authority of a church to refuse admission to scandalous sinners, from that which Paul's warrant gives them to excommunicate such. Having observed that neither the minister nor congregation have any right to examine those that desire communion, or enquire into their lives, you add, " I do not here speak of those vices which are a scandal to human society, and which, according to the judgment of St. Paul, will justify excommunication." I must own the meaning of this passage is not very clear, (not to insist upon the inaccuracy of it, you not having before spoken of *any* vices :) You do not say whether we may *examine* men concerning those vices which are a scandal, &c. or whether we may *refuse* communion to such as are guilty of them. The connexion seems best to suit the former sense ; tho' it must be owned, it sounds rather odd to talk of examining men about those vices which are a scandal to human society, since, if they are such a scandal, they must be too well known to need examination. But admitting this was your meaning, the latter supposition is implied in, or necessarily follows from it ; for if a minister or congregation have a right to enquire concerning mens characters, they certainly have a right to refuse communion to those who are found to have bad ones ; without supposing this, the enquiry would be utterly useless.

Well then, we seem thus far to be agreed : That a Christian society has, in general, an authority over its members, so as to excommunicate, and by parity of reason refuse, certain persons as unfit for communion
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with them, in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. What remains to be debated is, How far this authority extends: That is to say, What qualifications a church may demand as necessary in those that are admitted to communion—and by what means they are to obtain satisfaction concerning those qualifications.

As to the former, it is no wonder that we should differ, since I find you differ from yourself. In one part of your work you say, there is nothing in the New Testament that requires *any other* qualification than a *profession of christianity*, and ask in the language of defiance, (p. 30.) "What right have Christians "at this day to insist upon *any other*?" Nay, it seems, "a previous declaration of a man's being a Christian is by no means necessary."—In the passage just before quoted, (p. 33.) you allow that "such vices as are a scandal to human society" are a sufficient bar to communion. But in the very next sentence (which you desire may be *noted*), you in effect allow all mankind a right to it, if they desire it, excepting only those that have been excommunicated. "Let it be noted (say you) that, according to the "practice of the primitive church, *no person* was excluded from the Lord's Supper, who was not formally excommunicated." A remark, worthy of note, truly! and which could not easily escape observation, on account of its glaring inconsistency, not only with the well-known truth, but even with what you yourself had allowed, viz. that a profession of christianity, and a freedom from scandalous vices, are necessary terms of communion. With what consistency can these be allowed necessary, if the primitive church admitted all but the excommunicated? unless you will say that the primitive church excommunicated all infidels and scandalous sinners; that is, (like the church of England) excommunicated those that never belonged to it: or else, that we may insist upon other terms of communion than the primitive church

church required: neither of which suppositions, I am persuaded, you will allow.

What terms of communion a Christian is warranted to demand I now proceed to enquire. And here I desire it may be "noted," that (as was before acknowledged) I am of opinion, no church has authority to make any new terms of communion for itself; as this would be invading the office, and even disputing the wisdom of Christ, the alone head of the church. I as much abhor all human impositions in matters of religion, as you can do, and would as warmly enter my protest against them. I am willing to determine this part of the present controversy, as well as the others, by the sole testimony of scripture, desiring only the liberty of interpreting scripture according to the rules laid down in my First Letter, on which I have all along proceeded. Strictly adhering to these, I cannot but think, that all Christian churches are warranted to admit none to communion with them but such as give credible evidence, that they embrace christianity as a divine religion, that they understand and believe the leading articles of it, that they are free from all scandalous vices, and that they are holy in heart and life; in a word, that they are 'altogether Christians.' I have already proved, by several scripture arguments, that such persons as *these* alone have a right to communion with a Christian society, in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, or can with propriety attend upon it; and that all but such ought to abstain from it: and I have now proved that every such society has authority to judge concerning the qualifications of those that propose themselves as members, before they be admitted: From whence it seems to me naturally to follow, that such a society has a scriptural authority to refuse admittance to all who do not answer to the above description. If churches have any authority at all with respect to the admission of their members, it is reasonable,

reasonable to suppose it extends to every qualification of which they can be thought competent judges, and that they are warranted to exclude all who give plain evidence that they are excluded by the laws of Christ. It would seem very strange that he should appoint an ordinance for the true members of his church, his genuine disciples, to celebrate *alone*, forbidding others to intrude amongst them, and authorize *them* to judge concerning the qualifications of such as may offer to join them, and yet warrant them to refuse none, except known infidels, or persons guilty of such vices as are a scandal to human society; but admit mere nominal Christians of all kinds, whom they knew to be as really incapable of answering the ends of the Lord's Supper, as the openly profane. Whatsoever the scripture makes to be an essential qualification of a communicant, it appears most rational to suppose, that, as none ought to offer themselves to communion who are destitute of it, so those who are the appointed judges of mens fitness for this ordinance, ought to require credible evidence of it, and to admit none without it.

But further; we have seen, in the preceding letter, that the directions of scripture with respect to excommunication of members, will assist us in judging concerning the necessary qualifications of them. It has been observed that christian churches are required to reject from their communion such as are guilty, not merely of those vices which are a scandal to human society, but of any irregularity which proves them not to be real christians. From hence I argued, that such persons ought to abstain from the Lord's Supper, tho' their real characters were known only to themselves. I now further infer (which I think I may do with at least equal justice) that the church has sufficient authority to refuse admittance to such, when they have plain evidence of their characters, though they should desire it: for it would be most

unreasonable to think, that they ought to admit such persons as members, whom they would be obliged to excommunicate as soon as admitted.

But my chief argument I reserve as my last, which is drawn from the example of the primitive churches. You have been pleased to assert, that they refused none but such as had been formally excommunicated. I have already observed to you, that they admitted neither infidels, nor scandalous sinners. I shall now attempt to prove, that they received none but such as gave credible evidence of their being "Christians, in the moral sense of the word." It is, at least, a strong presumptive argument, in favour of this supposition, that the members of those churches (as I have before shewn) are addressed as saints, as sanctified, as justified, &c. and that those who afterwards were found to be wicked, are called false brethren, crept in unawares. But not to insist upon this, it is too well known to need proof, that the first Christians admitted none into the church, that had not been baptized; and it is as well known, that the first preachers of the gospel would baptize none but those that professed to believe and repent. Even in the earliest dawn of gospel-light, John the baptist, our Lord's forerunner, expressly forbade the Pharisees coming to his baptism, for want of the fruits of repentance correspondent to their profession. See *Matt.* iii. 7. 8. His baptism is called 'the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;' and those that were baptized by him, are said to have come 'confessing their sins.' Nor was the baptism of Christ administered to any (that were adult) but to such as professed faith and repentance; by which are meant, not such an external regard to the gospel as mere nominal Christians might discover, but such graces as constitute a real Christian, and are connected with salvation, as is plain from

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the following passages: 'He that believeth and is
' baptized shall be saved. Except a man be born
' of water and the spirit, he cannot see the kingdom
' of God. Repent and be baptized, every one of you,
' for the remission of sins. Then they that gladly
' received his word were baptized. If thou believest
' *with all thine heart*, thou mayest. Arise and be
' baptized, and wash away thy sins; calling on the
' name of the Lord. The washing of regeneration,
' and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.'

Should it be objected here, "that these texts do
" not relate to the Lord's Supper," the answer is ob-
vious: they conclude as strongly in favour of the
point we are defending as if they did. If the primitive
churches admitted none to baptism, but such as appear-
ed to be real Christians, they certainly would admit
none but such to the Lord's Supper; since none were
suffered to communicate with them in this ordinance
who had not been received as members of the church
by the other. For baptism was appointed as the rite
of initiation into the church; whereas the Lord's
Supper is a means of communion with it. And it
is most easy and natural to infer, that those who
ought not to be admitted members of a society,
ought not to have communion with it. This might
serve to account for it, if it should be found, that
there are no instances in the New Testament, of a
church's refusing any persons communion with them
in the Lord's Supper, for want of evidence, with
respect to their piety; or if it should not be expressly
said, that none but such as give this evidence ought
to be admitted to it.—However, it is plain, that
the primitive Christians were very cautious in ad-
mitting to intimate fellowship with them (and much
more, surely, at the Lord's Table) even those that
professed to be real converts, and to have been bap-
tized; as appears from the conduct of those at Jeru-
salem, towards the apostle Paul, when he offered

to associate with them; though he could assure them (as no doubt he did) that he had not only been baptized, but even preached Christ. We are told, *Acts ix. 26.* ‘ When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.’—From these circumstances, let any unprejudiced person judge, whether “ the primitive church admitted all to communion, except those that had been formally excommunicated;” and from the several arguments I have produced, whether every Christian society is not warranted to exclude all that do not give credible evidence of their being real Christians.

But it may not be amiss just to take notice here, of what you have alledged against this doctrine, in your *Letter* to Mr. Venn, p. 42. “ In this imperfect state (say you) it is evidently our wisdom to suffer many *tares to grow up with the wheat.* The proper time for separation is the day of judgment, when it will be done effectually and finally.” To this I answer, Our Lord in the parable to which you refer (*Matt. xiii. 39. 40.*) concerning the wheat and the tares, is not necessarily to be understood, as forbidding his church to reject such mere nominal Christians as may have crept into it, when they have plain evidence of their being such; for this interpretation would make the excommunication of any members of the church unlawful; but only as discouraging an attempt to discover and extirpate all hypocrites that may have gained admittance; as condemning a too officious zeal in the members of the church, in finding flaws in the characters of professors, and dealing with the utmost severity towards them: a conduct most certainly very unbecoming fallible, sinful men, from whom the utmost candour and tenderness are due to each other; and might be attended with very unhappy consequences.

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in often excluding sincere, tho' imperfect Christians. It is, doubtless, much better to suffer many hypocrites to remain in a church, than to cast out one truly pious member. And, therefore, none ought to be excluded on account of the uncharitable suspicions of particular persons, or, on account of any thing not plainly made, in scripture, essential to the Christian character; or without the clearest evidence of guilt, after an impartial examination, friendly reproofs, suitable warnings, and a sufficient time of trial for amendment. But if, notwithstanding this charitable procedure, any members of the church are found to be destitute of a truly Christian temper or conduct, and the excluding them could not be supposed to affect any real Christian, this parable of our Lord, I apprehend, does not discourage excommunication; and we have seen, there are other scriptures which warrant it. But, let it be carefully observed, that whatever be the meaning of this parable, it is quite foreign to the purpose to apply it here, since it relates entirely to the *purging* the field, or *casting out* what had proved a nuisance; whereas, the matter of our enquiry is, *not* whether mere nominal Christians are to be *rejected* from church-communion, but whether, when they are previously known to be such, they ought to be *admitted*. Between these two cases there is a manifest and considerable difference: though (as I have before argued) none ought to be received as members who would immediately deserve to be cast out, it does not follow, that all ought to be received, who, if they were *already* members, ought *not* to be ejected. There should be strong positive evidence of guilt, to *eject* a member; whereas the want of positive proof of piety, might be an objection to the admitting of one: so that, supposing it were true, that all mere nominal Christians, who have got admittance into the church, were to be suffered

to remain in it; you cannot justly infer, that therefore all such ought to be received. Though it might be hazardous to *pluck up* tares, because the wheat would be in danger of being pluckt up with them, that is no reason why tares should be *sown*. In many cases it would be safe and easy to *prevent* an evil, though it might be difficult to *remedy* it, and hazardous to make the attempt. But I am persuaded, the passage in question is so far from favouring your cause, that it makes strongly against it. The tares are said to be sown by an *enemy*, who, in the explanation of the parable, we are told is the *devil*: from which circumstance, as, also, from the husbandman's displeasure, it is manifest, they ought not to have been sown among the wheat. Another remarkable circumstance is, that the tares are said to have been sown *while men slept*; so that this evil is ascribed to the culpable remissness of the servants, who, if they had done their duty, might have prevented it: whence it is natural to gather this instruction, that mere nominal Christians have no right to a place in the church; that if those that bear the keys of the church, are watchful and diligent in their office, they might, in a great measure, prevent their admission; and that such drowsiness and neglect, as give such persons an opportunity to enter, are highly culpable and displeasing to their master.

Having thus shown what qualifications a Christian church may demand in those whom they admit to communion, we proceed to consider the other question which arises upon this, viz. By what means they may seek satisfaction, whether those that desire communion are thus qualified? Are we to take it for granted, that all those who offer to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us, are qualified according to the laws of Christ, whether we are acquainted with their characters or not? Or (to use the words

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which you have, very naturally, put into the mouths of your readers p. 33.) "Must not the minister, or the congregation, enquire into the life and conduct of a person, before he be admitted to communion with them?" The answer which you yourself have given to this question, is as follows. "I answer frankly, that I find no such authority committed to any minister or congregation: men are directed to examine themselves—but the minister is not directed to examine them; and we must not go beyond our commission." An answer which has so little foundation in reason, that you yourself seem scarcely satisfied with it, as you have thought proper to soften the matter, and in a manner to unsay what you had said, in the next sentence, of which I had occasion to take some notice before. "I do not (say you) here speak of those vices which are a scandal to human society." In these words you have allowed (as I have already remarked) that a minister or congregation *may* enquire, Whether those that desire communion with them, be free from *scandalous vices*; so that you have in fact granted that general right which you seemed to deny, of enquiring into the lives of persons before they be admitted to the Lord's Supper. We only differ, then, in our opinion with respect to the extent of such an enquiry. You allow, a minister or congregation may enquire into the lives of candidates for the Lord's Supper, so far, as to gain satisfaction, that they are free from scandalous vices (though you do not say whether they are to examine the persons themselves, or enquire their characters of others): Whereas, I assert, that a church may enquire, Whether they are free from *every* vice that is inconsistent with a Christian profession? Whether they lead holy, exemplary lives? And whether they understand and believe the leading fundamental articles of the Christian doctrine. I also assert, that these

these enquiries may be made of such as are best acquainted with the persons desiring communion, and likewise of those persons themselves. You say, "you no where find such authority committed to any minister or congregation." Pray, Sir, tell us, where you find that which *you* claim. We have just as express an authority for examining whether the persons who desire admission to the Lord's Supper, give credible evidence of their being real Christians, as you have for enquiring whether they are free from scandalous vices. The truth is, there is no *express* authority, in either of these cases, committed to any Christian church, for such examination; nor was there occasion for it: it naturally follows from the nature of the ordinance, and from that general authority, which, we have seen, churches have over their members, so as to exclude those that appear unworthy. How must they know whether those that offer to join their society, ought to be received or not, unless they enquire? A right to refuse any, necessarily supposes a right to enquire of all: the extent of this authority must be determined by the necessary qualifications for church communion. If it should appear from scripture, that all those who make a profession of Christianity, who believe that Christ is a teacher sent from God, and who are free from scandalous vices, have a right to the Lord's Supper, but only such; and that, if any others have gained admittance, they ought to be excluded; it naturally follows, that a church has a right to enquire, Whether those who desire to become members of it, are thus qualified, and no further. But if (as I have endeavoured to prove) none have a right to admission but such as give credible evidence that they are real Christians, then every church has authority, upon your own principles, to examine whether those that desire admission, appear to be real Christians or not, and

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to enquire both into their lives, and into their faith. If, in any other society, an established law required that none should be admitted into it but persons of such and such qualifications, though no authority was expressly given to the members of it, to examine the candidates, with respect to them, would such examination be deemed an imposition? Why it should, then, in the present case, I am at a loss to conceive.

But let it be further observed, as this right of enquiry seems reasonable in itself, and follows from the nature of the Lord's Supper, and the general authority of a church over its members, so it seems to be confirmed by some accounts we find in scripture, of the conduct of the primitive churches. It was usual for them, even to send letters of commendation of their members to other churches, when they had occasion to desire fellowship with them, which implies, that they were strict in enquiring into the characters of those who came to the Lord's Table. See *Acts* xviii. 27. *Rom.* xvi. 1. *2 Cor.* iii. 1. And, to recur to the case of Saul, and the church at Jerusalem, before mentioned, as the disciples there were all afraid of him, when he offered to join himself to them, we are told, ' Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them, how he had seen the Lord in the way, &c.' Another remarkable instance to my present purpose is, the profession which was demanded, previous to the admission of any to baptism, which is the rite of initiation into the fellowship of the church; which instance serves to prove, as I proposed doing, that a church may not only enquire concerning the *lives* of those that desire admission, but also into their *faith*; and likewise that they may make their enquiry, not only of *other persons*, acquainted with them, but also of the candidates *themselves*. I shall therefore

therefore take some more particular notice of this fact by and by.

You have been pleased to assert, (p. 30.) that "a previous declaration of a man's being a Christian is by no means necessary [to his attending the Lord's supper]. This action is, itself, the declaration, and a more significant and solemn one than any other."

That is to say, a person's actual coming to the Lord's table is the declaration of his fitness for it. Upon this principle, all persons whatsoever, who attend this rite, are (or at least we must suppose they are) duly qualified for it, though we have no proof but *this*, that they are not scandalous sinners, or even infidels; nay, though we have absolute evidence of their being such! And further; according to your assertion, when any apply for admission into the church, though there be strong reason to suspect that they are grossly ignorant, or even vicious, and that they are actuated by the basest of principles, neither the minister nor the church have a right to demand any declaration with respect either to their knowledge, their faith, or their practice: for if "no previous declaration, with respect to either, be necessary," certainly no enquiry can be vindicable. You have indeed expressly asserted it is not. "Men are directed to examine themselves, (say you) but the minister is not directed to examine them, and we must not go beyond our commission." Let us only apply your way of reasoning to any other similar case, and you must, I should think, see the weakness of it, not only here, but in some other parts of our debate. Suppose a number of *Britons*, residing for a time in a foreign country, for any particular purpose, had formed themselves into a society, and had obtained a charter from the government there, by which they were entitled to certain privileges peculiar to themselves, and such others of their country-

countrymen as might settle there. Suppose further, that a certain periodical feast was appointed, at which all the members of the said society should be required to attend, with a particular view to preserve their distinction from the natives of the place; to commemorate the favour and indulgence of the Prince that had granted them their immunities; to testify their subjection to his government, and their conformity to the laws of their charter; as well as their regards to each other. Now supposing any new settlers proposed to join this society, with a view to enjoy certain emoluments, let me ask any impartial person, what evidence it might reasonably be expected they should give, or the society demand, of their being true Britons? Would it be thought a violation of the law of kindness, or an undue usurpation in the members of that society, or an infringement of the liberty of others, to examine them concerning their pretensions of being subjects of the British empire; though their charter had not expressly enjoined such an enquiry, but only in general terms excluded all others? Or would their coming to the British feast be judged "the declaration," and such an one as to supersede any other? Attending the said festival would indeed be a sufficient *proof* (to the members of the society, and to others) what persons *were* acknowledged as British subjects, if none but such were known to be admitted; but it were absurd to consider this attendance as what gave them a *right to be* so acknowledged; since, if all had a liberty to attend, "without any previous declaration of their right," then persons of other nations might and would do it from motives of interest, and thus the distinction between Englishmen and others would be utterly lost. The application of this to the case in point is easy. Attending the Lord's supper is a declaration of a man's Christianity; and I will allow you, "the most significant and solemn one he can
" make,"

“make,” and his being admitted to it is a proof of his being acknowledged by the church of Christ as a true Christian; but it does not follow from hence, that no “previous declaration is necessary:” this rather *makes* it necessary. No one ought to declare, *in this way*, that he is a Christian, nor to be acknowledged as such by others, unless he really be one. Now a *previous profession* is the proper proof that he is a Christian, and that he has a right to that ordinance, in which he makes the declaration of it publick, and is also acknowledged by the church as such. And indeed, without supposing some such previous declaration as you object to, and the right of a church to enquire concerning the faith and practice of candidates for the Lord’s Supper, that ordinance would cease to be what you say it is, the declaration of a man’s Christianity; because then, those that were not Christians might partake of it, and doubtless would, in many cases, which you cannot be at a loss to suppose, wherein their secular interest might be promoted, but their consciences must be shamefully prostituted, and the credit of religion would grievously suffer.

But you will probably object, “that the means proposed is insufficient to answer the end, as it is impossible to know the hearts of men, and after the strictest care in examining persons before their admission into the church, many hypocrites will get into it.” I answer, it is readily allowed to be impossible always to detect hypocrisy, and to keep cunning and evil-designing men out of the church. But though some will intrude notwithstanding the strictest guard, that is no reason why all should have free admission without enquiry. Though some, well skilled in the art of deception, might pass the trial, others would quickly discover themselves; and especially the grossly ignorant; who, when asked concerning their views of Christianity and of the Lord’s Supper,

Supper, could not answer at all without betraying their ignorance. And I am fully persuaded, that there are many persons who would make no scruple of coming to the Lord's Supper, if they could answer any sinister purpose by doing it, (though they were conscious of their unfitness for it) could they do it without any enquiry into their views, &c. who would not be hardy enough solemnly to declare to a church or minister what they knew to be false, and who would be deterred from attempting it, by the prospect of such a previous examination.

Besides, it may naturally be supposed that this method would be serviceable, in putting many persons upon looking into the state of their minds, and taking pains to be duly prepared for this ordinance, who might otherwise attend it in a careless manner, and satisfy themselves with the 'form of godliness, without the power of it.'

"Well, but after all, where is the *authority* of a minister or a church thus to examine men, previous to their admission to the Lord's supper? We are not directed [in scripture] to examine them, and we must not go beyond our commission." I answer; this authority, though not expressly committed to them in scripture, naturally follows from scripture-premises, as well as from reason; and would be thought justifiable in the case we have supposed above, or in any similar instance. But let it be further observed, that this authority in Christian ministers, which I am vindicating, seems to me necessarily to follow from the nature of their office, as watchmen, as shepherds, as overseers, as rulers of the church; and to be included in those general exhortations delivered to them, to watch for souls as those that must give an account, to instruct, to warn, to reprove, to exhort, &c. according to the necessities of their several hearers. Now, in order to discharge their duty with fidelity and success, it is

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in many cases as necessary for them to *examine* (or, if you dislike that word, to *question*) the persons with whom they have to do, with respect to their views of things, and the dispositions of their minds, as it is for the physician to enquire of his patients into the particular state of their bodies, in order to adapt his prescriptions thereunto; in which case, no one is unreasonable enough to question his authority, or to charge him with going beyond his commission; and why a minister's right to enquire into the state of the minds of his hearers should be put upon a different footing, or why he should be thought to need any express commission, I am at a loss to conceive. If he would inform their judgments in any important particular, he must know that they are ignorant; if he would warn them of any danger, he must know whether they are liable to it. But in many cases he cannot know either, whatever he may suspect, without enquiry. To apply this to the present case: Suppose a person intimates his intention to come to the Lord's Supper; the minister has reason to suspect that he does not understand the nature and design of it, or that his views in coming to it are unwarrantable; that he is absolutely unfit for this solemnity, and in danger of 'eating and drinking judgment to himself;' will you say that minister must shew a particular commission from heaven, before he can claim an authority to ask that person what his sentiments and his views are, in order to instruct or warn him, to prevent his aggravating his own guilt, and bringing a discredit on the religion of Jesus? By the same method of reasoning you might as easily prove, that neither a minister nor a parent has a right to catechise children, because, though they are ordered to instruct them, they have no express commission to *examine* them; and they "ought not to exceed their commission," or go beyond the bounds of their lawful authority.

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But I must further observe to you, Sir, that this right of a church (or minister in their name) to examine candidates for communion, and to demand some previous declaration of their Christianity, seems to have sufficient foundation in the well-known practice of the primitive church. You have told us, that "all professing Christians have a right to the "Lord's Supper." What you mean by *professing* Christianity, as giving this right, I am at a loss to find: but it is plain the scripture makes it to be that very thing which you except against as unnecessary, viz. "a previous declaration of a man's Christianity," there called 'confessing with the mouth.' See, amongst other passages, *Rom. x. 19, 20.* 'If 'thou shalt *confess with thy mouth* the Lord Jesus, 'and shalt believe in thine heart . . . thou shalt be 'saved: for with the heart man believeth unto 'righteousness, and *with the mouth confession* is made 'unto salvation.' This profession of faith, or declaration of a person's Christianity, was as necessary as baptism itself, and required previous to it; which (as was hinted above) is a fact of considerable importance in the present debate, baptism being the rite of initiation into the church. When we read, in the New Testament, of persons *believing*, and being thereupon baptized, we are to understand it of their *professing* to believe: for *Simon Magus* himself, it is said, believed, and accordingly was baptized. We cannot reasonably understand this account of him as implying that he was a real believer, but only that he *professed* to be one. We read concerning some converts, that they 'came confessing their 'deeds,' and declaring that they believed Jesus was the Christ. Even *John's* disciples, when they came to be baptized by him, 'confessed their sins.' And it appears that a profession of faith was demanded in the primitive times before the person, desiring baptism, was admitted to it; as is evident from the case
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of the Eunuch, to whom Philip preached the gospel in his chariot. When, upon seeing a quantity of water, the Eunuch asked what hindered his being baptized, Philip, having before preached to him Jesus, demanded a profession of his faith, (not considering baptism itself as "*the* declaration of it,") "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." The Eunuch accordingly made his profession in these words, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Which profession, according to the usual language of the New Testament, and taken in connexion with Philip's enquiry, together with his previous instruction, amounts to a declaration, that he embraced all the essential doctrines of Christianity, that he cordially approved the way of salvation by Christ, and cheerfully submitted to it. That we have so few instances of the like profession recorded, and that those are so concisely expressed, may easily be accounted for by considering, that the sacred history is usually exceeding brief, more being generally to be understood than is expressed; that certain particulars mentioned in a few cases may naturally be supposed in other similar ones, though not noticed; and especially that the primitive times (as Mr. *Venn* has well remarked *, p. 52, &c.) when Christians were persecuted, rendered it less necessary to demand a very explicit profession than the present, when Christianity is established by the civil magistrate, and it is rather to a man's secular advantage, than otherwise, to bear the Christian name.

From what has been advanced on this part of our subject, perhaps it may appear, that you had not so sufficient a foundation as you imagined for charging those churches with making unscriptural terms of communion, or rather with "having gone deep in-
"to superstition," (for that seems to be the con-

* I can by no means think with you, (Letter to Mr. V. p. 41.) that he has said more on this head than the case required.

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nexion) who require "an account of persons experienced in religion, as an evidence of their being in a state of grace, and having a title to heaven, before they can be admitted to communion."

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I will not undertake to vindicate, but on the contrary will freely express my disapprobation of, those societies that insist upon a minute and circumstantial account, from all whom they admit to communion, in all circumstances, of the means by which serious impressions were first made upon their minds, and the manner in which the work of religion has been carried on, &c. for, though such accounts may sometimes be truly edifying to others, many pious persons are not able to give them, and they are no necessary evidence of being in a state of grace. Least of all can I attempt to vindicate the conduct of those deacons, or other members of churches, who take upon themselves, in an authoritative manner, to examine the candidates for communion, concerning such articles of faith as neither they nor themselves are likely to understand, and as are acknowledged by good men in general to be by no means essential to the Christian character; to enquire into all the feelings of their minds; to demand a kind of confession of their secret sins; or to insist upon direct answers to such questions as are adapted more to display their own knowledge (oftener perhaps their own ignorance) than to procure any rational satisfaction concerning the meetness of the candidate to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Such intolerable usurpation as this ought ever to be discouraged, as it has, in many instances, been attended with very pernicious consequences. Many pious persons have been deterred from the thoughts of that holy ordinance, which, could they otherwise have been admitted to it, they would have attended with delight. And some, it may be, who have proposed themselves to communion

nion with churches in which these usurpations have been practised, have been so disgusted at the impertinent and absurd questions of their examiners, as to have taken up an unhappy prejudice against all manner of church-discipline, and, from conceiving perhaps too highly of the Lord's supper, have been insensibly led into the opposite extream; and have not only soon undergone a total change in their sentiments with respect to discipline and doctrine too, but have learned to inveigh with bitterness against even the appearances of those things in any, which they have seen others abuse. It is not at all improbable that Dr. *Priestly* himself might receive his first disgust against Orthodoxy from the injudicious conduct of some or other of its patrons, and that we may owe his book upon the *L. s Supper*, at least some passages in it, (and perhaps some other of his writings) to the impertinence of those that took upon them to examine him for this ordinance. Ask yourself, Sir, whether I am not right in my conjecture; and if I am, tell me whether it is reasonable, in all cases, to question that authority which may be abused; or whether it be worthy a wise man, because he has seen or felt the bad consequences of one extream, to run into the opposite? What though the conduct of those churches be unjustifiable, that insist upon a circumstantial account of a person's experience in public, does it follow, that therefore, the minister must not enquire into his life, and question him with respect to his faith in the leading doctrines of the gospel, and his views in coming to the Lord's Supper? Or because some have demanded a confession of what they had no right to know, and what, when known, could afford no proof of their fitness for the Lord's Supper, must we infer, that therefore requiring *any* profession is an imposition? Between these, there is certainly a very wide difference: the former appears to me to have no foundation either in scrip-

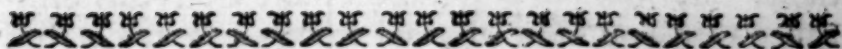
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ture or reason ; the latter, I cannot but think, abundantly warranted by both. From a careful attention to the several passages I have produced, relating to church-fellowship, especially those just mentioned, respecting a verbal profession ; and from considering the nature of that relation, into which, receiving the Lord's Supper brings us ; and likewise what is usually practised upon admission into *other* societies, it appears to me entirely scriptural, and most highly rational, that a christian church should enquire concerning the character of those who want admission into their society, should desire evidence of their faith and piety from *others*, and should demand a profession from *themselves*, either from their own mouths, or by the minister, “ that they cordially
 “ embrace the Christian religion ; that they are not
 “ conscious to any thing in them inconsistent with
 “ the Christian temper ; and that it is their firm
 “ resolution, by the grace of God, to walk as
 “ becometh the gospel, and to behave, in every view,
 “ suitable to that relation to his church, into which
 “ they are about to enter.” Desiring your impartial consideration of what has been advanced, I conclude this Letter, with subscribing myself,

Rev. S I R,

Your's, &c.

LETTER



L E T T E R VIII.

Rev. SIR,

THE next enquiry, in which I proposed to attend you, is, "What is the *advantage* of celebrating the Lord's Supper?" Your answer to which, is as follows: "It is of the same nature with that which results from repeating any custom, in commemoration of any other important event; of the same nature with the celebration of the passover, for instance, among the Jews. It tends to perpetuate the memory of the transaction recorded by it, and to cherish a grateful and joyful sense of it. In this case, the custom tends to perpetuate the memory of the death of Christ, and to cherish our veneration and love for him: it inflames our gratitude to so great a benefactor, and consequently, our zeal to fulfil all his commands: moreover, being the joint action of several, it strengthens our affection to the common cause, to one another, and to all who are engaged in it." (p. 28.) I have no objection, Sir, to this account, so far as it goes; but think it very defective; and the remark which you have subjoined, appears to me highly unwarrantable. "If you expect more than this (say you) with respect to yourselves or others, your expectations are unreasonable, enthusiastical,

“and sure to be disappointed.” Bold enough truly and, I will maintain it, equally false. There are those, Sir, who not only expect more from this ordinance than you have allowed to be warrantable, but have actually found something more in it, which has proved to them beyond dispute, that their expectations were not unreasonable; and the testimony of scripture, in my apprehension, sufficiently vindicates their expectations, and their feelings, from the charge of enthusiasm.

Besides the advantages which, in the passage now quoted, you have asserted to be the only ones that can rationally be expected from the Lord's Supper; give me leave to mention the following, as what I apprehend we may with equal reason hope for from it, considering the nature of the ordinance, and the general promises of the gospel, with respect to the benefits accompanying a due attendance upon all divine institutions.

The first I will mention is, that it tends to confirm the Christian's faith in the divine original of the gospel, and consequently, in the important doctrines of it. This follows from your own account, (p. 28.) “This custom of celebrating the Lord's Supper, “may be considered as a proof of the most interesting facts, relating to Christianity. If they be “not true, how could this custom have arisen?” The frequent repetition of it then tends to establish the Christian in the belief of those facts, and by the frequent contemplation of those spiritual objects which are presented to his view in this ordinance, his faith in them is increased, so that they make a deeper impression upon his mind: nor can I see that it is irrational to suppose, that those influences of divine grace are bestowed in this, among other means, to invigorate that faith in Christ, which is said to be the gift of God, which is the foundation of, and the grand incitement to all good works.

Another advantage of celebrating the Lord's Supper is, that it strengthens our obligation to a life of universal holiness, which it does, not only as we have the most cogent motives to such a life, in the most forcible manner represented to our minds in this institution, but as we hereby voluntarily enter into the most solemn engagements to it. This advantage is so obvious, even upon your own principles, that I am astonished you should have omitted it here; for you expressly tell us, (p. 30) the language of the action is, "I resolve, by the grace of God, to live and die like a Christian." But can a man make such a declaration, in so solemn a manner, and yet bring himself under no stronger obligation to purity of temper and life, than he would be under without it? And would the guilt of such a person, if he should continue in sin, be no greater than that of another man? To me it appears highly irrational to assert it; and tho' you have asserted it, when you say, (p. 34.) "If a man be, in fact, a Christian, the obligation to a Christian-like behaviour is much the same, whether he declare his belief of Christianity before the world, or not;" yet, towards the close of your work, (p. 56.) as I hinted in a former letter, you seem to oppose this sentiment, when (calling upon Christians to "declare themselves such, by this solemn act") you say, "I call upon you to own, and in some measure to *strengthen your obligation to a virtuous life*, by a more public profession of Christianity; and let it be a motive with you, to a *stricter watch* over your thoughts, words, and actions; that in nothing you may act unworthily of the gospel of God, whereof you make profession." Now, I would ask, Whether (as we need all possible obligations to an holy life) it be not an *advantage* to be brought under the strongest? In this view many have expected great benefit from the Lord's Supper, considering themselves as thereby

bound in a solemn covenant to be the Lord's, and have actually found their expectations answered; as the fear of incurring the guilt of violating their sacramental engagements, has proved an happy preservative against those temptations to which they would otherwise have fallen a prey, and an important means of establishing and quickening them in the ways of God.

Strange indeed, then is it! that you should not merely have omitted, but absolutely precluded this advantage, as indeed you have done every other, which persons expect from this ordinance, "more than" what you had mentioned as belonging to it, by saying that their "expectations are unreasonable, "enthusiastical, and sure to be disappointed." What is there unreasonable or enthusiastical in such an expectation as this? Or, on what authority will you assert, it is sure to be disappointed?

A further advantage resulting from the celebration of this rite, which you have omitted, is, that it tends to excite the utmost abhorrence of sin, and consequently the greatest care, in watching against it, and the warmest zeal in our endeavours to oppose it; as we have here the most lively affecting view of its evil nature, of its dreadful consequences, and of the divine displeasure against it, in the sufferings which the Son of God endured, to make an atonement for it.

The Lord's Supper is also admirably adapted to promote the Christian's comfort, and peace of mind, amidst the various trials of life, and especially, under that load of distress and fear, which the consciousness of guilt occasions. What can be conceived to afford so much, or such solid comfort to an heart burdened with grief, of any kind, as the view which this ordinance gives us, of a Saviour's love, and of the unspeakable everlasting blessings which are the fruits of his cross? What can administer such

peace and joy to a mind overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, as the discovery of that ‘ blood which cleanseth from all sin;’ and that abundant mercy of God which is vouchsafed to all penitent believing souls, through the mediation of his Son?

Further, the Lord’s Supper is, I apprehend, an eminent means of enjoying the presence of God and the Redeemer; and of having ‘ fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.’ You have not merely omitted this, in mentioning the advantages of celebrating this rite, but you have, elsewhere, excepted against it (or rather, against a gross *misrepresentation* of the matter) in the following words: “ This opinion of a divine virtue, and the presence of the divine Being, in the sacrament, and of the communicants having, consequently, a more immediate intercourse with God upon this occasion, would necessarily make it appear a very solemn and awful thing to communicate, because it was an appearing before God.” p. 41.* And in another passage, which I may properly consider along with this, you express yourself thus (p. 50.) “——By dissenters, the receiving of the sacrament was considered as a kind of receiving Christ, in some mystical, though not in a proper and carnal sense. And so long as there remains a notion of any peculiar presence of Christ in the sacrament, and consequently, the idea of some extraordinary virtue being communicated by it, it is no wonder that a long train of awful ideas accompany every thought about the Lord’s Supper, and that it is approached by us with an undue and superstitious

* To this you add the following sentence: “ They would naturally apply to this purpose, a saying that was current amongst the Jews, and which we find in Moses, that *no man can see God and live*; man being a sinful creature, and God infinitely holy.” I make no remark on this passage, but this, that I don’t understand the meaning of it in this connexion.

“reverence.” Some of the expressions which you have used in this passage, are calculated (I would not willingly suppose, *designedly*) to convey false and injurious ideas, concerning the sentiments of the dissenters on this subject. Surely, Sir, you must know, if not, you might easily have known, that the persons whom you censure, do not imagine, that God is, in any other sense “present in the sacrament,” than as he is with good men in general, in attending his institutions; nor do they pretend to a “more immediate intercourse with him,” than in other exercises of devotion. Is not God, in a special sense, present with good men, when devoutly engaging in such exercises? Have they not intercourse with the Father of their spirits, on such occasions? And is not every religious service, “an appearing before God?” Why, then, are these expressions objected to, as applied to the Lord’s Supper? You will probably urge, that they are understood in a more awful sense, in reference to the Lord’s Supper, than to other duties; for you add, “—This would make it appear a very solemn and awful thing to communicate.” I answer, it is not from an apprehension of any peculiar presence of God, in this ordinance, that any entertain the most formidable ideas of it, but from the nature of the profession made in it, and the danger of receiving unworthily. I readily acknowledge, that many are *unreasonably* terrified at the thoughts of this institution: but is it not a *solemn and awful thing to communicate*, considered merely as an appearing before God, as in other religious exercises? Is there nothing solemn and awful in that profession, which even you allow is implied in attending this rite? If not, why do you say there is? You yourself, Sir, have applied the word *solemn* to this ordinance, at least half a dozen times*; you have used it in your

* See p. 30. 56, &c.

very definition †; and you have even asserted, that this way of professing one's Christianity, is more solemn than any other ‡.

As to "the presence of *Christ* in the sacrament," you have no foundation to insinuate, as you seem to do, that any dissenters, suppose any real presence of his in the *elements* themselves; much less such a peculiar presence, as to alter their nature, and make them any other than real bread and wine; they only believe that Christ is present *with his people* by his *Spirit*, when they worthily attend his supper, so as to bless it to them, and render it a means of spiritual benefit. Nor do they suppose any "extraordinary" virtue is communicated by it," if by this is meant any physical effect of the bread and wine upon them, or any kind of benefit essentially different from that which they expect from other means of religion; much less that it is to be received by the mere act of partaking of the elements: they only maintain, that the serious attendance upon this ordinance, is one very eminent means, among others, of promoting real religion in the soul, and of obtaining those supplies of grace, from Christ, which are requisite, in order thereunto. And as to their "receiving Christ" in this institution; I know not, that they adopt this phrase with peculiar reference to the Lord's Supper; if they use it in this connexion at all, it is not any otherwise than as they use it in general, not "*in a mystical sense*" (as you express it) any more than "*in a proper and carnal sense*," if by this term you mean any thing more than *in a spiritual, or figurative sense*. By *receiving Christ*, as far as I understand the sentiments of those that are called orthodox, among the dissenters; they only mean, embracing him by faith, in the several characters he sustains, and accepting the various blessings which he be-

† p. 27.

‡ p. 30. 34.

flows on all true believers. And I cannot help thinking that they are fully vindicated in the use of these and the like expressions, and in their application of them to the Lord's Supper, by a scripture-warrant. Has not Christ promised that he 'will be 'with his church always, even to the end of the 'world *?' Has he not declared, that 'where two 'or three are met together in his name, he is in the 'midst of them †?' Now, when can Christians be said to meet together in his name [*εἰς τὸ ἰμὸν ὄνομα*] if not at his table, when in a peculiar manner, 'the desire 'of their souls is to his name, and the remembrance 'of him ‡?' When, therefore, may they expect the benefit of their master's presence, if not on such occasions? To have "intercourse," or communion with God, and with the Redeemer, is a privilege, which all true Christians are encouraged to hope for, in the exercises of devotion, particularly in their social services, when they have fellowship with each other, which they may more especially be said to have in the Lord's Supper, which is called the communion of the body of Christ. 'That which we have seen 'and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may 'have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship 'is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ §.' The Lord's Supper, is a feast upon a sacrifice. "As 'the Jews feasted upon their paschal lamb, after it 'had been first presented to God, so do we, *sacra-* 'mentally, and *by faith*, upon ours §." Now as they who partake of the sacrifices offered to idols, or dæmons (as the apostle takes notice) had fellowship with those dæmons; so those who partake of that which was sacrificed to God, have fellowship with God. And as the bread in this ordinance, is called 'the communion of the body of Christ, and the 'cup, the communion of the blood of Christ,' it

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

† xviii. 20.

‡ If. xxvi. 8.

| 1 John i. 3.

§ Grove on the Lord's Supper, p. 52. 56.

may naturally be considered as a token, and as a means of communion with Christ; of our believing, dutiful regard to him who gave himself for us, and of our partaking the blessed fruits of his sacrifice. That "receiving Christ" in the sacrament, which you call mystical, may easily be interpreted and vindicated by such passages of scripture as these, and indeed by many others in which the very expression is used*; but more particularly by some which I shall just now have occasion to mention.

I shall only observe here; that those views of the Lord's Supper, which have now been considered, and to which you object, do not (as you suppose) occasion "a long train of awful ideas, to accompany every thought about it, and a superstitious reverence for it;" but, on the contrary, tend to give the Christian pleasing apprehensions of it, and to encourage his cheerful approach to it.

There is another form of expression, commonly used in speaking of the benefits attending the Lord's Supper, which I wonder you have not excepted against, and that is, *eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ*. You have, indeed, expressed your disapprobation of that answer in the assembly's catechism, in which a similar phrase occurs. This phraseology I shall now (as I promised, p. 20.) attempt to vindicate, as what I think expressive of a very important part of the nature and benefit of the Lord's Supper. The words of the catechism are, "—his death is shewed forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace."—In order to explain this form of speaking, and maintain the propriety of it, give me leave, Sir, to remind you,

* John i. 11. 12. Col. ii. 6. Heb. iii. 14, &c.

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that the New Testament continually speaks of believers as having such an intimate relation to, and dependance upon, the Lord Jesus Christ, as is expressed in the strongest terms language affords, and represented by the highest similitudes in the whole circle of nature. They are said to be in Christ, and he in them; he is called their life, he animates their souls as their souls animate their bodies; and they are spoken of as being one with him. See to this purpose the following texts of scripture. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates. I live, yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me. The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and they in me, that they also may be one in us.' The similitudes used to express this vital union with Christ, are such, as the relation of branches to the root, and of the members of the body to the head. 'I am the vine (saith he himself) ye are the branches: As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. We are members of his body, of his flesh, and his bones.—That we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body (fitly framed, and firmly united by the conjunction of the parts mutually supplying one another, according to the respective energy that operates in each) receiveth its encrease towards the completion of itself in love.'—But there is another very strong and uncommon metaphor by which our Lord himself is pleased to represent the dependance of believers upon him, for maintaining and perfecting the divine life in their souls, which is taken from those natural actions on which the life of the body depends, *eating and drinking*. He speaks of himself as their food, and describes them as feeding upon his flesh and his blood, and as living thereby,

by, and enlarges upon the absolute necessity of thus living upon him. As his language is very remarkable, and as this figure of speech is frequently repeated in different forms, I will transcribe those passages in the 8th chapter of John's gospel, wherein it occurs, omitting the intermediate words: 32. ' Verily verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. 35. I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, he that believeth on me shall never thirst. 48. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead; this is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. 53. Verily verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.'

Before I make use of this passage for my particular purpose, I must beg leave to hint a little at the meaning of it. I can by no means think, that our Lord here refers only to the receiving his doctrine, or attending to his instructions; for though there be many passages in scripture, in which divine instructions are represented as the *food of the mind*, and compared to delicious *meat* and *drink*, and teach-

ers are said to *feed* their disciples; there is no text to be found (except in this discourse, of our Lord himself) in which the *Teacher himself* is called food, and we are required to eat his flesh and drink his blood. This appears a most extravagant figure of speech, unparalleled in any writings human or divine, upon any other supposition, than that Christ did not merely sustain the office of a Teacher, but that he came to offer himself a *sacrifice* unto God for the sins of the world; that by his incarnation and sufferings, particularly on the cross, when his body was broken or wounded, and his blood was shed, he procured spiritual and everlasting benefits for all true believers; and that by eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, he intends, believing the efficacy of his atonement, by faith relying upon it, and accepting the glorious blessings which are the consequences of it; particularly the free mercy of God to pardon sin, and the influences of the holy spirit to purify the soul, and to transform it into the Saviour's own image. On this interpretation (but on no other) I can see a propriety in the apostle's allusion, 1 Cor. v. 7. 8. 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven,' &c. In what sense does the apostle speak of Christ, as our passover, sacrificed for us, and of Christians, as keeping a feast; unless he intended to represent them as partaking of that sacrifice which Christ offered, as exercising a believing regard to that 'Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world,' of whom the paschal lamb (which the Jews were required to *eat*) was the type? This they may in an especial manner be said to do in the Lord's Supper; which answers to the paschal feast under the law. This ordinance (which some, indeed, think is particularly referred to in the above passage) may properly be called a feast upon a sacrifice, and therein, I now proceed to shew, true believers eat the flesh,
and

and drink the blood of Christ, in the sense in which he used that expression, in that discourse of his with the Jews, which I quoted above.

I am, indeed, firmly of opinion (for the reasons Bishop *Hoadly* suggests) that our Lord did not refer (at least principally) to this institution, in that discourse; but that is no reason why it may not be considered in relation to it, and as expressive of those acts of the mind, which are required in it, and those benefits, which are represented and conferred by it. There are many passages in the New Testament, in which the writers intended not the least reference to either of the positive institutions, which are of admirable use to give us right apprehensions concerning the dispositions of mind, with which they ought to be celebrated: such, for instance, you will allow to be those, which treat of *repentance*, as necessary to *baptism*, and of *brotherly love*, in doing good, forgiving injuries, &c. as requisite to a due attendance upon the Lord's Supper.

What, though (as Bishop *Hoadly* urges) eating Christ's flesh, and drinking his blood, is expressive of such a regard to Christ, as is not *peculiar* to the Lord's Supper, and was required before it was instituted, and would have been the duty of all, had there been no such ordinance? This is no just objection to our application of this passage. It is readily allowed, true Christians do feed by faith upon Christ, before they come to his table, and at other times, and by other means; nay, even though (by reason of some unhappy mistake) they utterly neglect this. But it does by no means follow, that they do it not in this institution; for with as much reason might it be said, that the exercises of brotherly love, of repentance, or even of faith in Christ, and the thankful acknowledgment of his benefits, have no relation to this ordinance, because they are not peculiar to it. But the Lord's Supper seems to be, not merely one
means,

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means, among others, of feeding upon Christ's body and blood, but a very peculiar and eminent means of exercising that faith in Christ, and that regard to his atoning sacrifice, to which these actions may be ascribed; since that body and blood are there, in a peculiar manner, presented to their minds, as the objects of their faith, by the bread and wine, which are the emblems thereof. The phraseology used in reference to the Lord's Supper, so much resembles that of our Saviour, in his discourse with the Jews, that we may naturally understand it as expressive of that same spiritual eating and drinking there intended. Christ says of the bread, *This is my body*, and of the wine, *This is my blood*. Moreover, he required his disciples not merely to behold them, but to *take* them, to *eat* the one and *drink* the other. It is doubtless true, (as Bishop Hoadly remarks) that the bread and wine are the *memorials* of the body and blood of Christ, *i. e.* of his natural body and blood; but it does not therefore follow, that (as he maintains) it is improper to consider the receiving the bread and wine as the token of the *mind's* feeding by faith upon Christ; receiving and rejoicing in the happy fruits of his incarnation and death. And indeed, without including this idea, there seems to be no propriety in the actions of eating and drinking. Bread and wine placed before our eyes, only to be *looked at* by us, would have been a lively *memorial*, or representation of Christ's natural body and blood; and had nothing more than this been intended, the *receiving* these elements would have been unnecessary. But since we are required to *take* and *eat* 'bread, which 'strengtheneth man's heart,' and is the staff of life; and to take and drink *wine*, 'which maketh glad the 'heart of man,' and cheers his spirits; being told that the one represents the body, and the other the blood of Christ; and since we are elsewhere assured, that unless we eat the flesh and drink the blood of
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the son of man, we have no life in us, it is natural to consider this eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper, as a token and a means of our *feeding spiritually upon Christ*; of our deriving nourishment from him, for the life and joy of our souls: which is very consistent with considering these elements as the memorials of his natural body and blood. The justice of this idea seems to be confirmed by the apostle Paul's account of the matter: "the bread which we break, is it not the communion [*κοινωνία* the communication, or joint participation] of the body of Christ? The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not the communion [*κοινωνία*] of the blood of Christ?" In the Lord's Supper, while our bodies are fed with bread and wine, our souls feed upon that which these elements represent, the body and blood of Christ; we exercise a believing regard to him as the life of our souls, and by faith accept of the blessings procured by his sacrifice, whereby our spiritual life is maintained, our strength increased, and our joy in the Lord promoted. The objection of Bp. Hoadly will here probably be urged, whose words are these: "To say that this communion is the actual partaking of all the benefits of Christ's broken body and blood shed, is not only to put that upon one single act of obedience, which is, by our blessed Lord, made to depend upon the whole system of all virtues united; but has this peculiar absurdity in it, that in this rite which was instituted for the remembrance of Christ, it destroys that very notion of remembrance, which is the essence of it. Its great design is to call to remembrance the death of Christ, and what is implied in this, to commemorate the benefits accruing to Christians from it. To make it therefore the actual partaking of these benefits, is altering the nature of it, as much as the actual partaking of any thing is different from the remem-

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“bering it. It is to suppose those benefits present which are to be commemorated, &c.*” But I do not suppose, nor do I think that the assembly of divines in the answer referred to, p. 107, meant, or that our writers upon the subject in general mean, that in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, believers do *actually* partake of *all* the benefits of Christ’s death, since this would imply many absurdities; but only, that by the act of eating and drinking in this ordinance, they do, in a peculiar manner, testify that believing regard to Christ, to which all those blessings are promised; that Christ, by giving them the sacramental bread and wine, gives them the pledges of his love, and exhibits to them his body and blood as their food, the life of their souls, in such a striking manner, as is calculated to confirm their faith and enliven their joy; and that in attending this rite, as far as they actually exercise that regard to Christ, which may be called feeding upon him, they do actually partake of those blessings which are connected with that regard to him, and which their circumstances at the time require, and render it fit for them to receive. Nor can I see that this is at all inconsistent with the primary idea of the design of the Lord’s Supper as a remembrance of Christ. Observe, it is not called a remembrance of his *benefits*, as the bishop will have it; they are not spoken of by our Lord as to be *commemorated*; they are not to be considered as having been, and as now ceasing to be, conferred; they are such as continue to be bestowed on believers, and will do so to the end of time. And they are not all bestowed on such, immediately upon their faith in him, but out of Christ’s fulness, they continue to receive grace for grace; and the blessings of his grace are usually bestowed upon them in the attendance upon his institutions. So, that those blessings are not so pro-

* Hoady’s plain Account, p. 158.

perly the objects of remembrance, as the sufferings of Christ by which they were procured. And I cannot conceive any inconsistency between the remembrance of Christ's death, and the participation of those blessings which are the happy consequences of it; much less that this last view of the Lord's Supper is altering its very nature: with as much reason might it be said, that it would be inconsistent with the primary design of it as a remembrance of Christ; to pray to God for the bestowment of any spiritual blessing, or to exercise love to our brethren, or any other christian grace. If at any time we might expect a larger communication of divine blessings than at others, one might naturally suppose it would be, when (as in the Lord's Supper) our faith has peculiar respect to that blessed Mediator by whom they were procured, and through whom they are bestowed.

I will conclude this part of my subject, and this letter, with transcribing a passage from Dr. Taylor's Treatise upon the Lord's Supper, from whence it will appear, that *orthodox* writers are not singular in entertaining that view of the ordinance which has now been represented. And perhaps the sanction of such a name may lead some of my readers to think there is not quite so much superstition in this account of the matter, nor such an impropriety in my application of our Lord's discourse in the sixth of *John*, as they might otherwise have imagined.

The Doctor begins his second section thus: "Hitherto we have taken a general survey of the Lord's Supper; now we come to the provision, which our Father hath set before us in this spiritual feast, viz. bread and wine, representing the body and blood of Christ, which we are to eat and drink in remembrance of him, or with the attention of our minds fixed upon him. Eating Christ's body, and drinking his blood, are doubtless to be

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“ understood figuratively ; denoting, in an easy and
 “ familiar way, the improvement and comfort of
 “ the mind, by that which nourisheth and refresheth
 “ the body.” After having produced a variety of
 scriptures, in which this metaphorical language oc-
 curs, and made some remarks upon them, he goes
 on (p. 31.) thus : “ It is from this plain and current
 “ sense of scripture, that we must form our ideas of
 “ eating and drinking in the Supper of the Lord.
 “ And this is quite sufficient to supply the most clear
 “ and satisfactory notions of it. We there eat our
 “ Teacher, who is the bread of life, by attending to
 “ and receiving his heavenly instructions. But whereas
 “ we are commanded to *eat our Lord's body, and to*
 “ *drink his blood*, this requireth some further expli-
 “ cation, which we may take from *John vi.* There
 “ our Lord saith (ver. 51.) I am the living bread,
 “ &c. By this we understand, agreeably to the scope
 “ of the whole chapter, and to the sense of the whole
 “ New Testament; that Jesus Christ came from God,
 “ furnished with all divine wisdom and truth to in-
 “ struct mankind, &c.—And further, Christ is that
 “ living bread, as he hath given up, sacrificed, his
 “ flesh—for the life of the world. By comparing
 “ these four verses [54, 47, 40, 35] it evidently ap-
 “ pears, that eating Christ's flesh and drinking his
 “ blood, is the very same as *seeing him* with atten-
 “ tion and serious consideration, *believing on him*, or
 “ having right conceptions concerning him, and
 “ *coming to him*, or embracing his doctrine and obey-
 “ ing his instructions ; that is to say, it is to have
 “ such a knowledge of Christ, such a due and deep
 “ persuasion concerning the grace of God in him,
 “ and concerning the truth and excellence of his
 “ doctrine, as engages us with pleasure and thank-
 “ fulness, to follow him in all obedience to God, in
 “ the practice of all that virtue and piety which he
 “ hath taught and exemplified, both in his life and
 “ death,

“ death, as absolutely necessary to qualify us for the
 “ enjoyment of eternal life. And in this manner
 “ we are to eat Christ’s body and drink his blood
 “ in the Lord’s Supper. For though the eating of
 “ Christ’s flesh, and drinking his blood, spoken of
 “ in the sixth chapter of *John*, may have no imme-
 “ diate reference to this ordinance which was not
 “ then instituted; yet the Lord’s Supper may be
 “ well explained by our Saviour’s discourse in that
 “ chapter, and our eating and drinking in this ordi-
 “ nance must be in the same spiritual sense in which
 “ it hath been explained; otherwise it would be a
 “ memorial of Christ, neither suitable to the ends
 “ of his death, nor profitable to the nourishment
 “ and comfort of our minds.” I leave this to your
 impartial consideration, and am,

Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IX.

Rev. SIR,

I Fear I have, by this time, almost exhausted your patience; and indeed I have been much more prolix than I intended. But bear with me a little longer: This Letter shall conclude my present correspondence with you. There remains only one question more to be discussed, which I will dispatch with all possible brevity. It is this: What *Preparation* is necessary to a proper attendance upon the Lord's Supper? Your answer to which (p. 35.) is as follows: "I apprehend nothing more is necessary, than coming to public worship in an ordinary way, This act of religion, only requires that serious and composed state of mind, which is a temper that a good man (who never indulges himself in criminal excesses) habitually carries about with him; and supposes only that due sense of the nature of what we are about, which may always be recollected at once, without particular preparation. And it is well known, that the primitive Christians of the first centuries, received the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day, as a part of their common worship." And in another place (p. 54.) you write thus: "From the same source it is, [*i. e.* superstition] that we have days set apart for solemn
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“ preparation before the receiving of the sacrament,
 “ among all our denominations. It is not denied,
 “ but that these days may be spent to good purpose;
 “ but care should be taken, that they be not made
 “ a handle for superstition: for I am free to say,
 “ that these days of preparation for the Sacrament,
 “ are nothing more than the remains of Popery.
 “ Indeed it was impossible that there should have
 “ been any such thing in primitive times; when the
 “ Lord’s Supper was received every Lord’s Day, as
 “ part of their common worship.”

I am very ready to acknowledge, that some good men have carried the business of preparing for the Lord’s Supper to an unwarrantable excess, looking upon themselves and others as utterly unfit for the ordinance, and obliged to absent themselves from it, unless they had spent so many hours in private devotion, and heard a preparation sermon, perhaps unless they had read so many pages in a preparation-book, even though their hinderances were unavoidable. This I condemn as superstition. I am firmly persuaded that an heart renewed by divine grace, and devoted to God thro’ Jesus Christ, is the grand preparative for this institution; that a real Christian therefore is always habitually prepared, and that the want of preparatory exercises cannot utterly disqualify such a person, much less if it be involuntary. Such cases may happen, wherein I should think it a person’s duty to celebrate the ordinance, tho’ there should be no opportunity for any previous recollection: for instance, if he should not have had notice of the administration of it. But there is a wide difference between considering particular preparation for this ordinance as in all cases absolutely necessary (especially such a kind and degree of it as I have mentioned) and censuring it as superstitious, *in ordinary*, to make *any at all*. This is an opposite extrem, in my apprehension equally unreasonable

with the former, and by far more dangerous. You do not, indeed, directly say, that the Lord's Supper requires *no* preparation, but only, "that nothing more is necessary than coming to public worship in an ordinary way." You here seem to allow that public worship in general requires *some* preparation; but *what* you have not told us. However, be that what it may, I think it unjustifiable, upon your principles, to say that the Lord's Supper requires nothing more; for you have acknowledged this (p. 30, 34.) to be *more solemn* than the other; and if it be more solemn, it seems to require more preparation. For my own part, I cannot but think, that the ordinary parts of public worship require more previous preparation, in order to answer the great designs of them, than is generally made; and am persuaded, that if Christians took more pains than they usually take, to bring their minds into a proper frame for attending divine ordinances, they would derive much more benefit from them than they commonly do. Precipitately to rush into the divine presence, without endeavouring to collect the thoughts, to quiet the passions, to compose the mind, and to cultivate a devotional frame is, methinks, upon all principles, highly unbecoming creatures, and especially sinners. A man who truly fears God cannot habitually do this; nor satisfy himself ordinarily to go to public worship, without endeavouring to prepare his mind by previous reading and meditation, nor without humbly imploring the divine aids, to fit him for attending divine institutions, and to render them instrumental in promoting his improvement in knowledge, holiness, and comfort.

But inasmuch as the Lord's Supper not merely partakes of the nature of public worship, but is, as you allow, "a more solemn declaration of a man's christianity than any other;" since it is (according

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to the foregoing account) not merely a solemn commemoration of the sufferings and death of the Son of God, for the redemption of the world, but at the same time a sign or seal of the covenant of grace; a declaration of mercy on God's part, and of faith, repentance, and new obedience on ours; we therein professing (as you yourself express it) our resolution, by the grace of God, to live and die like Christians; it seems to require some kind of preparation peculiar to itself, and some particular care to bring the mind into a proper state for exercising dispositions suited to the several objects therein presented to our view, and for answering all the ends proposed by this institution; which, according to *your own* account, are many and important. You tell us indeed, "this act of religion——supposes only that due sense of the nature of what we are about, which may always be recollected *at once*, without any particular preparation." It is true, a person who is tolerably acquainted with christianity, may easily enough recollect, *at once*, the nature of the Lord's Supper, and it is not easy to forget it; but will you say, this is all that "this act of religion supposes?" Surely Sir, you must allow, that in order to perform it in a manner acceptable to God and profitable to ourselves, it is necessary, not merely that our judgments be rightly informed, but that our wills be properly inclined, and our affections duly excited; that we be possessed of, and do in some measure exercise, repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; hope in the mercy of God thro' the mediator; love to God, to the Redeemer, and to our Christian brethren; hatred of all manner of sin, and a determined resolution, in the strength of divine grace, to live as becometh saints. It is also highly desirable, in order to a comfortable attendance at the Lord's Table, to experience a devotional frame of mind before

before we go thither, and to entertain some good assurance that we are the genuine disciples of Christ, and interested in the blessings of his covenant; for as far as the true spirit of devotion is wanting, and our fears prevail with respect to our real christianity, so far will our satisfaction and pleasure in the ordinance be abated. Now I cannot but think that it requires, in ordinary, some particular care, previous to the celebration of it, to have the mind thus prepared for it, so as to enjoy much pleasure in the exercise, and to receive much benefit from it. If indeed, that were true which you seem to suppose, *viz.* that communicants in general “habitually” “carry about with them a serious composed temper” “of mind, and never indulge themselves in any” “criminal excesses,” very little preparation might suffice. But that this is the case with mere nominal Christians, (and all such you say ought to celebrate this rite) I know not how to suppose; and leave it to you to explain. I can by no means think that is always the happiness of real Christians themselves. It is too possible, (would to God it were not too common!) *even for such*, thro’ the power of temptation, and by reason of their own weakness and irresolution, to indulge themselves in what may justly be called criminal excesses, of one kind or other: Where is that man who can say, he “*never*” does this? Where, especially, is that christian, who never finds the want of a “serious and composed state of mind,” so as to be indisposed for engaging in the exercises of devotion with pleasure and improvement? Those that have appeared to be the best acquainted with themselves, and to have made the highest attainments in religion, have been known to make very free and humble confessions on this head. Now when the mind is thus indisposed, whatever be the cause, especially if it be some criminal excess, it requires no small pains to recover
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such a frame as divine ordinances in general require, (I mean so as to answer the important practical ends of them) but more especially the Lord's Supper; which certainly is more solemn than the rest. You have allowed it to be so, and your own account of the nature and ends of it, proves that it is. And if that view of it be just, which I have given in the foregoing pages, it is *much* more solemn than any other institution, and it is more hazardous to attend this than any other, in an unworthy manner; which we do in proportion as the mind is unprepared. And I cannot help thinking, that the peculiar judgments inflicted upon the members of the Corinthian church, for their unworthy manner of celebrating this rite, afford a striking proof of the peculiar solemnity of it; and that they are recorded with a design to promote the reverence of communicants to the end of time; to guard them not merely against the very same gross abuse, but against every thing unworthy of the institution, and to promote a due concern both to form right ideas concerning it, and a temper of mind correspondent thereunto.

With respect to the *means* which are proper to be used in order to prepare the mind for "this solemn tho' chearful rite," I observe; it seems to require not merely the same previous exercises with public worship in general, viz. reading, meditation, and prayer; but that these exercises should be conducted with some particular reference to the Lord's Supper; to those objects which are therein to be presented to our view, and those acts about which the mind is therein to be employed, which more especially belong to this institution. — But let it be further observed, that there is one exercise which is particularly proper to precede this solemnity, and which the Scripture expressly recommends, namely, *Self-examination*. 'Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.' This exhortation

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exhortation is justly applicable, not only to those who are about to come to the Lord's Table for the first time, but to communicants in general. It is indeed contained in an address to the Corinthian church, and is expressed in such general terms, that we may naturally understand it as recommending frequent self-enquiry, even to Christians of the longest standing in the church, previous to their celebration of the Lord's Supper. And it appears to me most highly reasonable thus to understand it, as there seems to be a great propriety in it, that Christians should, in ordinary, either in a greater or less degree, as circumstances require, and time will permit, examine themselves, when they are about to attend this peculiar ordinance of our holy religion.

That self-examination is in itself a reasonable and useful exercise, is what I need not here attempt to prove: reason and scripture unite in the recommendation of it. And it will, I suppose, be allowed on all hands, that it ought to be frequent, and that no age or character can render it unnecessary. It will also be further granted, that it is a matter of considerable moment, in order to secure the practice of it, that we should fix upon some certain times to be appropriated to this work. Now let me ask, what times we could chuse more suitable for a serious enquiry into the state of our own souls, than those, when we are just going to celebrate the most solemn ordinance of our religion, and to make a public declaration of our christianity? Such a previous self-enquiry, is of admirable service in fitting us for this institution, as it is a necessary means of obtaining the knowledge of ourselves; some good degree of which (if the above account of the Lord's Supper be just) is requisite to a satisfactory and useful attendance upon it. None but real Christians (we have seen) have a right to attend it at all, as they only are capable of answering the ends of it: so
that

that those who have not some good evidence concerning the truth of their christianity (if they have any tenderness of conscience) must find much of the pleasure of communicating abated, by the prevalence of distressing fears, lest they should 'eat and drink unworthily.' Whereas those Christians, who discover in themselves the essential evidences of their being the genuine disciples of Christ, can approach his table with an humble confidence, and 'rejoice in him with joy unspeakable.' Now this delightful evidence, with respect to their real character and condition, is not to be attained without serious, impartial self-examination. And as it is requisite that this should be a frequent exercise, What can be more proper and natural, than for a Christian, in ordinary, when he is going to make a most solemn declaration of his christianity, to enquire concerning the reality of it, even tho' he has done it again and again, and has drawn a favourable conclusion concerning himself? As there is always danger of self-deception, there is always need of self-enquiry. The oftener this is performed, the better. Those that still bear the test, have by every trial additional ground to hope that they are Christians indeed, and consequently, additional reason to approach this christian feast with satisfaction and joy.—But this self-enquiry should not respect merely the *truth* of our christianity, but likewise the particular state of religion in our minds. We should often examine ourselves, whether we have grown in grace, or whether we have gone backwards: what sins we have fallen into, and what duties we have omitted: what temptations we are most exposed to, and wherein we most need to have our resolutions confirmed, and our graces strengthened: what we have most to complain of, what to rejoice in, and what to desire. Such enquiries as these are necessary to direct our humiliations, our thanksgivings, and our prayers, previous to our approaching

approaching the table of the Lord, and will furnish suitable matter for our meditations and devotions there; and will thus prove a means of rendering this institution instrumental in promoting, what is the grand design of it, the interest of vital religion in our souls. I can see nothing of superstition or enthusiasm in all this, and am fully persuaded, that those Christians, who have most diligently pursued such a course, have found so much pleasure in it, and so much benefit from it, as have afforded them a conviction of the propriety of it, beyond the power of any arguments to remove.

In what you say concerning "days set apart for solemn preparation, before the receiving of the Sacrament, among all our denominations," I must observe; your manner of expression in some measure misrepresents the fact. *Days* of preparation we have *not*, among any of our denominations. We have indeed a service of about an hour, or an hour and half, in some of our congregations, consisting of the usual exercises of praying, preaching, and singing, with some particular respect to the Lord's Supper; but these preparatory services are by no means universal: there are many societies in the kingdom that have nothing of this kind; and many, of the strictest denominations amongst us, have no sermon, but only a meeting of the church, to transact affairs relating to it, accompanied with prayer. And let me add, that there is so little of this kind of superstition among the dissenters of the present day, that, where these preparatory services are kept up, they are so far from considering an attendance upon them as a necessary preparation for the Sacrament, that there are no publick exercises so much neglected as these. For my own part, I freely acknowledge, I can by no means consider them as necessary. But, where Christians have opportunity and inclination for them, why should they be discouraged? If it be expedient
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and useful for them (as I have endeavoured to shew it is) to take some pains in their *retirements*, to prepare themselves for celebrating the Lord's Supper, where is the impropriety of uniting together, to receive the assistance of their ministers with the same view?

But "it was impossible (you say) that there should have been any such thing in primitive times, when the Lord's Supper was received every Lord's day, as part of their public worship." Is it certain, Sir, that this was the case? I do not remember this was mentioned in any of the passages which you read to us out of the New Testament; and you said "you had read to us every thing therein contained relating to this ordinance." But, if there be any passage in which this fact is asserted, give me leave to ask, How is it consistent with that regard which you profess to the express words of the New Testament, as the rule of your conduct in relation to the Lord's Supper, to depart from what therein appears to have been the primitive practice? to separate this ordinance from the other parts of public worship, and administer it, instead of every Lord's day, only one in four? Surely this conduct must have contributed to increase that undue veneration for this institution of which you so much complain, and is as much an *abuse* of it as some others which you have pointed out. It is to be hoped that in the next edition of your *Free Address* you will be consistent enough to remonstrate against it. But, admitting that the Lord's Supper was received by the primitive Christians every Lord's day, as part of their public worship, it does not follow that it was *impossible* for them to have spent any time in social exercises preparatory to it. If they had any preparation for the stated service of the sabbath, they might have a particular view to the Lord's Supper as a principal part of it, as they esteemed it to be. That they did usual-

ly spend some time, by way of preparation for the sabbath, I think is highly probable, as this was customary among the Jews *: so that, instead of asserting, as you have done, "that these days of preparation for the Sacrament are nothing more than the reliëts of popery," it would have been more candid and natural to have supposed, that they had their origin in the preparation for the Jewish sabbath, which began three hours before the sabbath itself. Indeed Godwin tells us the whole day preceding was a kind of preparation; for they were allowed to travel no more than three paras, of which a man might in ordinary go ten, in a day; judges might not sit in judgment upon life and death; and artificers were forbidden to work. Now it is not unnatural to suppose that the first Christians might imitate the Jews in their preparation for the sabbath, and even carry it farther than they did; and that when they came to leave off the custom of celebrating the Lord's Supper every Lord's day, as great part of the solemnity of it was thereby abated, they left off their preparation for their ordinary sabbaths, and confined it to those wherein the Lord's Supper was to be administered.

But supposing it could be proved that the primitive Christians had no public services preparatory to the Sacrament, it does by no means follow that they ought to be discouraged among us; for if we are at liberty to depart from their practice, of celebrating the ordinance every Lord's day, to do it only once in a month, why should we not have equal liberty to differ from them in preparing for it? And let it be considered, that the frequency of their celebration of it rendered particular preparation the less necessary; so that, in proportion as we attend this rite seldomer than they did, there seems to be reason why we should prepare for it

* More especially at the time of the *Passover*. See Mark xv. 42. John xix. 14. 31, 42, &c.

more. You allow that "these days may be spent
"to good purpose;" but since they are "the re-
"mains of popery," you remark, "care should be
"taken that they be not made an handle for super-
"stition." True. But give me leave to observe
to you, Sir, that the present race of Dissenters are not
remarkably prone to superstition, so as to be in any
great danger of making a handle of these devotional
exercises for promoting it. There is much greater
danger of the opposite extream, of lukewarmness;
and I cannot help thinking that there is need of
much greater care, in crying down these services,
lest we promote that *levity and indifference*, which
are far more fatal to their interest as Dissenters, and
even as Christians, than that formidable thing super-
stition; and which, I am sorry to say it, have but
too generally accompanied those *rational* views of
things which some *free enquirers* among us have em-
ployed the greatest part of their zeal in propagating.

Thus have I attended you, Sir, in your several
enquiries, in the manner proposed at the beginning
of the work. I designed to have concluded it with
a few remarks upon some *detached passages* in your
Free Address, which appear to me very exceptionable;
but I desist, as I have already by far exceeded the
bounds which I at first prescribed to myself. I can-
not however forbear taking some notice of an asser-
tion of your's (intimately connected with the subject
last touched upon) which contains a severe and un-
pleasing reflection upon the body of the Dissenters.
"The Dissenters (say you, p. 53.) have gone deeper
"into this superstition than the divines of the
"church of England. Retaining fewer ceremonies,
"they have made so much the more of them. For
"this I may appeal to almost every thing the Dis-
"senter's have written on this subject *." If this
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* In this connection you particularly mention Mr. Henry's
Treatise, (which you say you believe is more read than any other,

be fact, it is exceedingly strange, and difficult to be reconciled with the peculiar advantages (of which you boast so much) which we have, over our conforming brethren, for freedom of enquiry. But I deny the fact. Not to mention how many *rational* divines among us have written on the subject before yourself, *almost* as freely as you have done, I must insist upon it that very few treatises, if any, have been published by the most rigid among them, that have a tendency to promote near so much superstition as many written by clergymen have, and as the common language and conduct of church-men respecting the Sacrament discover. Who among the Dissenters have ever considered, the receiving of the Lord's Supper, as absolutely necessary to salvation;

and of which you think you have seen the eleventh edition,) particularly that chapter in it intitled, *Sights to be seen at the Lord's Table*. I shall not now enquire into the merits of that book, tho' I cannot but say I esteem it as, in the main, a judicious and useful work, and rejoice to think it has gone thro' so many editions, and is still so much read. As to the chapter in question, I am astonished to find you select *that* as containing a remarkable specimen of the superstition of Dissenters. The title is, indeed, somewhat fanciful, tho' not very extravagant, considering the time when the book was written, and the author's peculiar turn for allegory; but *the chapter* only treats of *the objects presented to the mind at the sacramental table*; such as—*the evil of sin, the justice of God, the love of Christ, the conquest of Satan, and the worth of souls*. Let any impartial person say what there is superstitious or ridiculous in all this. You tell Mr. Venn, indeed, that you did not ridicule *the chapter itself*, but barely mentioned the title of it. I can only reply by quoting your own words, which are these:—*particularly THAT CHAPTER in it intitled, &c*. The truth evidently is, you had not lately read that chapter, but formed your ideas of it merely by what you recollected of the title; which, after all, is not as you have quoted it. This supposition is confirmed, by your saying you *think* you have seen the eleventh edition, (which by the way was printed so early as the year 1731) a pretty plain proof that you had not the book by you.—How would the like conduct have been treated in an orthodox divine?

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Testing, which you hope is more real than any other.

as that eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ, without which he has said, there can be no life in us? Who among us have insisted upon kneeling (the posture of adoration) at receiving the elements? Who among us exclude all persons from being present while the ordinance is administered, but those that partake of it? What books have we of *Weekly Preparation for the Sacrament, consisting of Prayers, &c. for every Day in the Week, previous to the receiving of it, particularly adapted to the holy Festivals of Christmas, Easter, &c.* And finally, I ask, What Dissenters have encouraged the private administration of it, to dying persons, to abandoned sinners, and even to condemned criminals, as a kind of *viaticum*, or a passport to heaven. These are things (as you must know) not uncommon in the church of England, and if they are not the very essence of superstition, I am at a loss to say what is. In short, church-men have very commonly fallen little short of the Papists in their notion of the efficacy of the Lord's Supper, making it a sort of *opus operatum*; whereas the Dissenters in general, consider it only as having a moral influence on the mind, like that of other institutions; tho' many of them look upon it as belonging only to real Christians; and some of them may think the danger of unworthy receiving greater than it really is.

It might naturally have been expected, that in these Letters, I should have examined into the justice of the account you give concerning the gradual introduction of *errors and abuses* with respect to the Lord's Supper; as that makes a considerable part of your work. But this I am not inclined to, (had I left myself more room for it) from a consciousness of my not having a sufficient acquaintance with *the Writings of the FATHERS*, which you so often quote; and I was the less disposed to attempt it, as *any* of your readers may satisfy themselves concerning the fairness

fairness of your quotations from them, (tho' you have not referred to the pages) by turning to LORD KING'S *Enquiry into the Constitution, &c. of the Primitive Church*; where they may meet with every passage you have produced. Nor will they doubt of the justness of your translations, as they will find them *verbatim* the same with those of that noble writer. And they will the less doubt of your integrity by observing, that you have been so singularly happy as to make some of the same remarks he had done, in the very same words.

On the whole, I must take the liberty to say, your work appears to me, far from (what you represent it) A scriptural Account of the Lord's Supper; and that you have omitted many passages which have an evident relation to the subject:—that it is also irreconcilable to the principles of sound reason, especially as in many parts of it, it is self-contradictory:—that it is extremely superficial, and needs in various instances to be explained (tho' you doubtless are, as you tell Mr. Venn, a *plain-spoken sort of a man*)—and finally, that it has a dangerous tendency with regard to the interest of practical religion. Whether the foregoing pages sufficiently prove these assertions, let the unprejudiced reader judge.

I beg of you, Sir, to weigh the arguments I have produced, with candor and impartiality; and, if you should think it worth your while to reply, to do it with that coolness, as well as freedom, which becomes one honestly enquiring after truth, and willing to propagate *only* truth. It will be easy for a person of your learning and abilities, to discover faults in my writing, and to turn many parts of it into ridicule; but let me entreat you to attend to the chief matters in debate between us, and to enter thoroughly into them. If in any respect I have written in an unbecoming manner; especially if I have any where misrepresented your meaning, it is more than I am conscious to, and I shall be willing, upon conviction,

to beg your pardon. If in any argument you shall prove me to be mistaken, I trust I shall ingenuously acknowledge my error, and thank you for leading me into the truth. And if, with respect even to the *principal subjects* of enquiry, you shall make it plainly appear, that I have misunderstood the scriptures, I will not *shock* you as a certain gentleman had done, by saying, that I will *burn my bible*; but will rather say, that I will study it *more*, as a book more difficult to be understood than I have hitherto thought it to be.

Wishing you success in every proper attempt to discover and to propagate the truth, above all to inforce the practical use of it, I remain,

Rev. S I R,

Your very humble Servant,

and hearty Friend,

A Protestant Dissenter.

